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An Ignorant in India

An Ignorant in India

BY

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PREFACE.

AN apology is looked for from people who, not having spent a lifetime in India, nevertheless venture to write a book about it. I offer mine willingly, the more willingly, because I am not guilty, I think, of the usual crime of offering hints to Lieutenant-Governors on how to govern, or even of undertaking, on behalf of people at home, a complete and critical survey of the needs and aspirations of the Bengali. Rather I have erred in not being serious enough, and in failing to make clear how many delightful and intelligent natives I met—not least among them that one who so courteously showed me round the station. But perhaps it is hardly necessary, even by way of regret, to say that Bengalis are not always the figures of fun which some people,

judging from reminiscences of the literary Babu, mistakenly suppose them to be. What I have tried to give is a fairly accurate account of a part of the life up-country in Bengal. I saw several of its districts and many of its people, and though, for convenience' sake, I have localised the happenings, they are to be taken as truer of Bengal in general than of any one district. . . . Five of the chapters have appeared separately in 'Blackwood's Magazine,' whose Editor has kindly authorised their reappearance in this connected form. The remaining ones are published for the first time.

THE AUTHOR.

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AN IGNORANT IN INDIA.

CHAPTER I.

THE FIRST DAY IN INDIA.

BENGAL blazed at us from the quays of Calcutta. It had given glimpses of itself before in the sunk green lands of the Sunderbunds; in the bungalows that stared out of their compounds among the palms, white and exotic-looking buildings; in that yellow sucking flood of the Hoogly, in which we had lain a night already, because our boat had lost the tide. The Hoogly is unnavigable by night, and by day only navigable to the Hoogly pilots, concerning whom every one says that they are the most skilled in the world—as they need to be (wherein the Hoogly may stand for a symbol of Bengal itself); so that, as I say, we

had had to anchor for twenty-four hours, and were already becoming accustomed to that day-sight—the brown flapping kites,—and to that night-sound which grows to be the most familiar of all—the screaming of the jackals.

Now as we drew in to the quay in the full afternoon sun, Bengal literally blazed at us. For on the quay, against a background of white walls and buildings, there stood many hundreds of native servants, dressed in every conceivable rich colour, from the scarlet and gold of the Government chuprassies to the most gorgeous clash that any mem-sahib might have invented for the adornment of her own private retainers. Not perhaps that colours do clash out there. The omnipotent sun forbids that any mere earthly colours should draw so much attention to themselves as to clash. Still there were combinations there which would have clashed in most places, and among them we looked doubtfully for the livery of the bearer who had been sent five hundred miles from up-country to meet us and see us safely to the Mofussil.

"You will recognise him," the Collector had written, "by his dark-green livery and staring eyes. He is very dependable and will manage all the tips.

He does not speak any English and will probably shout at you a good deal, as he believes this will make you understand. Point your luggage out to him and he will get you and it into a cab and take you straight to the station. You should have fair time to catch the train."

We had found that letter awaiting us at Diamond Harbour on the way up the Hoogly, and it seened clear enough. Since, however, we had arranged not to stop in Calcutta, the train was of importance, and the difficulty of recognising the dependable bearer among scores of dark-green figures with staring eyes made it seem not unlikely that we should miss it.

"Do you see anyone at all possible?" I asked Clothilde as we stood on deck gazing.

"Hundreds," she answered.

"So do I," I said. "The train goes in two hours. I think that as soon as we can get landed, we had better take a cab ourselves and leave him."

At this point our Goanese cabin steward tapped me on the arm and said,—

"This man say he have letter for you."

I turned round to find an extremely graceful person with extremely thin legs salaaming to me. He wore dark green, and his eyes were full of

sad wonder. In his hand he carried what we afterwards discovered to be a sort of wand of office. This was the cover and ribs of an ancient umbrella, of which the handle and most of the stick had disappeared, so that it had to be grasped and waved with the hand well inside. We were told by his master that he had had a new umbrella, complete with stick and handle, specially given to him to go to Calcutta with, but with the thriftiness of his kind he had left it behind in case it should get spoilt, and had brought this family heirloom of an umbrella instead. Few other people carrying this dust-heap relic could have looked so dignified.

"You are Bonamalee?" I asked, and Clothilde said of course he was, whereupon he salaamed to her and handed me a paper. It contained the words "Please show the bearer of this to Mr ——." He watched me with knitted brows as I read it, but the frown cleared a little when I nodded and put it into my pocket. He had not been sure, it seemed, that a mere Goanese steward would so instantly put him on our track.

"He is the first man on board," said Clothilde with pride, and this was the case and most creditable to him, even though, it turned out, he had

succeeded only by sitting for two days and nights on the quayside without even going into the city to do some shopping which he had been instructed by the Collector's wife to accomplish. However, as he explained to her when we all arrived, anything was better than missing us, whom he regarded from first to last as babes not to be trusted alone for a single moment in any part of Bengal. We surrendered ourselves meekly enough, and were clearly instructed by loud noises to stand by our baggage, which he marked with mystic signs of his own in chalk, until we were through the customs and he had collected enough porters to get it into a tikka ghari. I do not know how many coolies he commandeered, but I do know that when we were ready to start and Bonamalee had climbed on to the box beside the driver, about nine dusky creatures hung like bees to the step of the gharri and demanded payment from me.

Here ensued our first experience of how little mere noise counts in Bengal. As instructed, I had left all such payments to the bearer, who had no doubt underestimated the porters' efforts. At all events they were not satisfied, and said so fiercely and clamorously. The bearer reproached them with the utmost vehemence. They were unabashed

and screamed back at him. He retorted in kind. Their yells increased to such a pitch of fury that it seemed to be a question of his money or his life, and the curses he thundered in return must have reached to the fourth and fifth generations. Neither side seemed to be in the least moved. We objected because the gharri was standing with the sun streaming in with a power to which we were quite unaccustomed. I put my head out of the window and yells rent the air. Everybody gesticulated at once and shouted at once. I beckoned to the bearer to proceed. All the coolies glued themselves to the cab and resounded like parrots. The bearer outsquawked the lot. Finally, and because his voice was cracking, he drew from his pouch a rupee which he handed to me with a gesture that I was to give it to them as an ultimatum. I did so and said "Jao!" That is the word that is said to carry you through India, but you have to say it with the right air. I was too new and too mild to succeed with it. It had no effect but to produce more yelping. At that the bearer's anger reached its climax. He treated the coolies to a perfect typhoon of abuse, and as they bent slightly before it—but not much—he clapped the driver on the shoulder and waved his umbrella. The driver

slashed with his whip at his two ponies and we were off at a hand-gallop through the Metropolis of India.

Often a tikka gharri has been described—never complimentarily,—and indeed it is too like a hearse with shutters to it—in case the corpse you become inside it should revive sufficiently to welcome a breath of air—ever to deserve compliments. Nevertheless from that rattling, rickety, swaying Black Maria of a carriage, through its dust-inhaling shutters we caught sight of things that, for people in India for the first time, made the discomfort worth having. To residents they would have been nothing at all, and half seen at that—the fat brown limbs of Babus sprawled in other tikkas that passed us, semi-nude children like sandhoppers in the dusty roads, water-carriers with their wooden cylinders of water, hot officious-looking policemen, natives squatted in their shop fronts, the Great Eastern Hotel, tropical trees flowering behind hoardings of the west, filthy beggars, fine carriages—all in a Calcutta haze. These were the things we saw from a hard seat that seemed to do a gallop on its own account—quite apart from the tikka gharri,—and flung Clothilde into my lap and me into hers at intervals, without

leaving us dry enough throats for warning or explanation.

The need of travelling at that pace was not obvious, for we had two hours to catch the train in, but I fancy the bearer was indisposed to trust to such things as clocks and time-tables, and meant to make sure of the train even if it started an hour and a half before time. An hour and a half accordingly was what we had to spend in the uninteresting railway station, after we had torn through Calcutta in some seventeen minutes. The station was, however, cooler than the tikka gharri, and after we had purchased our tickets and had our baggage weighed and paid for, we tried its very poor imitation of a restaurant. This was a very tiny room—a Black Hole of a buffet—with two native attendants in it, two chairs, one small table and three glass bottles. The latter contained two or three very aged biscuits apiece, and we did not like the look of them, but one of the attendants said that if we preferred it we could buy a tin of biscuits instead, which we did. This tin and the tea were produced from a cupboard, I fancy, and we had them at the small table, and the bearer looked in at intervals to see that we were not choking

or running away, and when we seemed to have had enough he came and talked to us very fast and earnestly. We did not know what he was talking about, and though his gestures were many we did not understand them either. He went off therefore, and at the end of a few minutes returned with a Babu ticket-collector who informed me that he spoke English.

"What's the matter, then?" I asked. "What does the man want?"

The ticket-collector gave that pleased and deprecating smirk with which a native called upon to exercise his English usually opens.

"He want your paper of the luggage," said he.

"Is that all," I said. "What does he want it for?"

"He want it," said the Babu, "because he say that you are such an igno-rant that perhaps you lose the paper of the luggage. He say you give it to him. He not lose it."

"Oh! I see," I said, somewhat crushed, and Clothilde chuckled.

But it was worth handing over the receipt for the luggage, since just for a moment the clouds on Bonamalee's brow cleared, and as he pouched it, he almost brightened.

"Now he take you to the terain," said the Babu, and Bonamalee having cast a look of approval upon the man as upon one who has most unexpectedly moved mountains of stupidity — and having cast a look of urgency upon us, led the way to the terain, going a few paces ahead but looking back to see that we had not strayed. He evidently felt safer when he had piled lots of luggage and Clothilde into one of those roomy carriages which Indian trains draw, and when he came out of it, he regarded it from the platform with something of the air Wren might have looked at St Paul's with when it was nearing completion. The only obstacle still to be encountered was myself, and he looked from me to the carriage and back again with a frown and shake of the head that almost induced me to get in. But it really was too stuffy, and I had just landed in India, and wanted to see a little of what was going on, if it were only the life of the railway station. So I strolled up and down knowing that there was still an hour before the train went, and after me nervously clutching his remains of an umbrella marched Bonamalee. Whenever I seemed to be overstepping the limits, he would gently come up from behind and take

me by the elbow and turn me towards the carriage containing Clothilde and the luggage. Meekly I would walk back again and past it, only to be turned back as soon as I had got his appointed distance. I never had a keeper before, but I had one then. There was not much to be seen. My chief interest was to watch natives getting into the train. There were crowds of them, mostly carrying great bundles larger than the carriage doors, and as a rule they disappeared into the thirds — with their bundles — only by pressure from behind. Shaven or turbanned heads already inside would appear and protest violently but vainly against this violation both of their own comfort and of that axiom of Euclid which says that the parts cannot be larger than the whole. To my naked eye, the contents of those compartments — counting both passengers and bundles—were far bigger than the compartments themselves; indeed it was a mystery how some of the carriages held half of them. I remember looking at a intermediate carriage a few minutes before the train started, and it was a seething mass of bundles right up to the ceiling, where a brown dismembered head showing the whites of its eyes seemed to be the struggling

apex. The body and legs must have been somewhere about, but I could not see them. When I thought of the children I had seen getting in bearing with them large and sticky lumps of the most revolting sweetmeats, when I remembered the blazing sunlight and betel chewing, and saw them already starting to clean their teeth from the carriage window, I wondered if that particular set of Bengalis would enjoy their train journey as much as most Indians are said to do.

Our carriage remained empty, I am thankful to say, and Bonamalee must have been very pleased when he was able to close the door upon me some ten minutes before the train started. He stood at it until the last moment in case I should wander out and get lost; then, almost as the train began to move, made a dash for the nearest third, into which he drove his way like a battering-ram amid yells of disapproval. The last thing we saw of him as we glided out of the long station was his piece of umbrella being drawn in through the window.

The first stage of our journey was from Calcutta to the Ganges. It was December, and therefore the cold weather. The time of day was five o'clock and not so far from sunset.

Yet we were decidedly warm. A little more of that sun, as we slipped through the suburbs of Calcutta, and we should have been too warm. It seemed strange, but then, just as a train in England can be the coldest place in the world, so in India it can be the hottest, especially when it stops in some stuffy little station and the sun burns in through the shutters and does not go out again even when the train starts on its way through the endless leagues of unshaded plain land. Still we were not so hot that we could not be interested—through the carriage window—in our first view of the plains. Not that there is much beauty about the outskirts of Calcutta from the train. The impression that Calcutta itself gives of buildings peeling slowly away, of too obvious squalors and odours, of a city that does not wear well or wash well, follows one into the country skirting it. No doubt one can see well-equipped buildings in excellent repair—jute mills and temples and bungalows and such things—but for the most part they have the appearance of having seen better days. Heaven knows when those were. I suppose this decaying appearance is largely due to the corroding air, but the unpleasant green of the tanks and ditches adds to

it. The land is either caked brown or slimily green. Looking at it, one's conception of green undergoes a change. Here is nothing beautiful or cool or refreshing. The green of Bengal is a hot green, and if it has any beauty, it is beauty of a poisonous kind—associated with scummed water in which it is fascinatingly horrible to watch the dhobies washing clothes, and devotees of cleanliness dipping themselves till they are obscenely clean.

At every station at which we stopped, and at the moment we stopped, Bonamalee stood by our carriage door, peering in anxiously as though to count us and to make sure that neither of us had fallen out. He did not speak to us much. We had shown ourselves too plainly foolish to understand even the loudest speech. But he frowned at us often, and relief appeared upon his face each time the train started with us still in it.

Presently the sun set, and quite soon after it was dark, and we could see nothing from the windows except a shadowy flat land, until about eight o'clock when our train came to a standstill on the south bank of the Ganges. Here we had to change, cross by steamer and find another

train which would take us almost—but not quite —to our destination. The careworn face of Bonamalee and his now familiar umbrella were not unwelcome sights when we did draw up, for the platform, as we hurriedly perceived, was a screaming horde of coolies of all ages and sizes, brandishing torches and eager to snatch up luggage and bear it off into the night. Bonamalee's authority reduced the crowd that attacked us, to four—chosen, we felt sure, for their small size and meek appearance, as being less likely in the event of being unsatisfactorily tipped to indulge in the menacing language of the dock coolies at Calcutta. Two of them indeed were quite small boys, from the heads of whom Clothilde wished to remove her hat-box and shawl straps respectively, being convinced that their slim brown bodies would snap beneath the weight. Humanitarianism, however, is difficult to put into practice if you have no words (just as it is at times if you have too many words), and Bonamalee interpreted her anxiety as impatience to move forward. He therefore drove the two small boys before him furiously with his umbrella. It was quite a long walk to the river-side, but the small boys trod firmly and

we found ourselves on the boat in no long time, under an awning with a long supper-table spread the length of the deck aft. To this meal Bonamalee dismissed us with a wave of the hand. We could see nothing of the great sacred river except the lights of the steamer on the dark water, and celebrated our first acquaintance with it by the somewhat commonplace rite of eating supper—which consisted mostly of a perniciously strange curry, in the company of many talkative tea-planters making for Darjeeling. There was a handsome row of whiskey bottles all down the table, each holding an inch of sediment at the bottom. I hate to describe the Ganges only in this way, but this is a record of facts, and otherwise it was invisible to us. A new set of torch-bearing coolies met us on the other side and escorted us and our baggage to the train waiting there. By ten o'clock we were moving on again in a carriage completely shuttered to form a bedroom, and laying ourselves down on the lengthwise seats we slept till dawn. The train seemed to have come to a standstill then, and Clothilde, pulling up one of the shutters, reported that we were in a station, and that Bonamalee was standing outside on the platform with his umbrella.

He kept his eye on us for as long as the train waited in that station, which was, I suppose, fully half-an-hour. According to the time-table we possessed, we should not have stayed there more than five minutes, and I am sure the station-master—a Babu in well-fitting coat, pyjamas, and silver-buckled patent leather shoes, whose general appearance suggested that he had risen hastily and confusedly, only kept us there in case there was something that he ought to do with the train, though he could not for the moment remember what. We were not grateful, for Bengal's railway stations are not in themselves remarkable. Railway engineers all the world over seem to have decided that utility is the main thing to consider, with the result that a Bengal railway station is just as ugly as an English one and outwardly very like it. There are wooden platforms and one or two narrow hard benches, and a waiting-room, and a hole in the wall for buying tickets: in fact all the appearance of convenience and extreme of discomfort that one finds at home. Nor was there much animation in this one, for Bengalis do not rise early in the cold weather, since the early morning mists bring fever. They wait for the sun. Still that rises and sets very

quickly; and shortly after the train had started on, the misty grey in which the further country had been wrapped was swallowed up in sunlight, and we saw that we had come out of the ugly green land that surrounds Calcutta into a more spacious and arid country where the prevailing colours were brown and blue. The ploughed earth was all brown—with a touch of grey in it as though it were old and worn, and the pastures were brown too and very short, while above a great canopy of blue sky met the eye except on the horizon where the blue also turns to a brown, as a result, I suppose, of the dust always floating in the air at this time of year. It is this blur in the blue which distinguishes an Indian sky from an Italian one. It is as though between earth and sky there was not the same distance, as though they were not distinctly demarcated elements.

Wherever there was grass or should have been grass the tiny humped cattle strayed listlessly, far in most cases from the single trees that dotted the plains. Here and there a pair of the same small creatures drew the insignificant plough of the husbandman along the top of the sandy soil. There seemed to be no deep

ploughing and no manuring. We saw women and children following in the track of the cattle to pick up their droppings to be dried in the sun and used for firing later.

The guide-book we had with us gave no indication of anything worthy of mention along this piece of railway; but then guide-books still maintain a dignified aloofness from anything connected with the land. The tourists for whom they are written seem to be conceived as Victorian people, capable of being interested in landscape only when it can be described as picturesque. In India they are concerned chiefly with the ancient cities; and it is nothing to them that all around is a land having this peculiar fascination, that it has been cultivated for ages and changed scarcely at all. For centuries too, it has supported its folk and left them as it found them — not less poor, not more skilled, — only unchanged. Have the fixed seasons brought about fixed customs that never lead forward? Or does the sun and heavy air of Bengal so work upon the men born there that they grow up too fast and then wither into apathy? Some people maintain that no great nation has ever come out of a sun-

burnt country. Nations they say can survive in such climates, but never progress in them; that the energy which makes for advance is only to be found in temperate zones. The Bengal sun helps too much and hinders too much. It does the peasant's work for him and undoes the peasant, weakening him both morally and physically. Others maintain that agriculture in itself is not enough to ensure perennial prosperity. Men never save in the fat years for the lean years; they live on an uncertainty, and have nothing to fall back on. Certainly one sees that the Bengali peasants are poor, but in the ordinary way they do not strike one as miserably poor. What they make is little enough, but what they need—compared with Western standards—is infinitesimal. Houses, clothes, firing and footgear—these are almost negligible things under that sun. A leading cause of poverty—and of many other disagreeables in a great part of Bengal—is the prevalence of malaria. When I came to ride among the villages, I realised how disastrous it could be. I recall, for instance, stopping in one village round which some of the crops—potatoes, tobacco, and such things

—were wretchedly poor and looked to have been most disgracefully planted. The Collector enquired of some of the villagers why this was, and they said that at the time of planting all the grown-ups had been down with fever, and the work had had to be left to the children, who were ignorant. It might have been an exaggeration, but the place plainly did suffer from malaria, and the apathy that ensues was over it. For a physical explanation of the Bengali lack of energy, malaria would count high. If it were the only one, there would be great hopes for the future. I suppose the day of the fever-bearing mosquito will in due course come to an end. That would mean not only its extinction but probably some change of climate brought about by the drainage and other improvements which would have to precede it. These will not be accomplished quickly, but it is safe to assume that its accomplishment would raise the physical standard of the Bengali very considerably. Might he not, thus improved, be capable of learning to rotate his crops, feed the land instead of robbing it perpetually, look after his cow as well as venerate it, invest his money as well as hoard it up for the benefit

of dacoits, manage his agricultural affairs in general with his brains as well as with his hands?

I am anticipating the questions that come upon one later, when one begins to ride about the country. We could not see the mosquitoes and their effects from that railway window, or realise much the great influences of the sun and the air of Bengal. But even from the train we could see that the mists at dawn were heavy, and that men did not rise early or display much energy, and that their ploughs only scratched the surface, and their cattle grazed where no grass was. We could feel too, a little, the fascination of the endless flat land, and could have enjoyed these monotonous plains with their periodic bamboos and meres, in which buffaloes and pond birds wallowed, for a longer time even than the train which was an hour late allowed us to. Still, not having provided ourselves with breakfast or anything to drink, and the heat being considerable by 10 A.M., we were not sorry to find ourselves reaching the junction where the Collector was to meet us to take us the remaining few miles to his station.

There was the junction at last, and there was

he waiting on the platform. From the window next to ours Bonamalee was signalling with his umbrella piece — as a result of which, almost before the train had slowed down and some time before it had stopped, a small pack of men, most of them wearing on their belts large brass plates containing the words "Collector and District Magistrate," had leapt on to the foot-board and invaded our carriage. They were the Collector's chuprassies, and had come to transfer our luggage to the third and last train. As we got down, Bonamalee was salaaming to the Collector, and thereby handing us over to his charge and freeing himself from the awful responsibility of the last few days. The light upon his face as he did so almost amounted to a smile, but he recollected himself in time and busied himself instead in superintending the work of the chuprassies. We shook hands and delivered messages from England, and then the Collector said regretfully that he was afraid that we shouldn't have time to get breakfast there, as the other train had been waiting for us over an hour and would probably go on at once. Having ensconced us in it, however, he thought we might at least get hold of some tea, and

beckoning to a Babu railway official, who was amiably regarding us from a short distance, asked him briefly what time the train would start.

The Babu wriggled himself into a smile, delighted to be able to impart information to so important a Sahib.

"This te-rain, your Honour," he said, "will start at 9.5." He did another smile and repeated "at 9.5."

The Collector replied—

"It is now 10.15. Therefore to say that this train will start at 9.5 is neither intelligent nor useful. No doubt it ought to have started at 9.5, but it didn't, and if you don't know when it will start, you had better go and ask the station-master."

The Babu departed, smiling more doubtfully, and I said to Clothilde—

"Here we see the tyrannical Anglo-Indian rudely addressing the kindly Bengali who is trying to help him."

The Collector laughed—

"Globe-trotter," he said.

CHAPTER II.

A DEAD-WATER CITY OF BENGAL.

THE city lay on the plains, not so far from the Nepal frontier, and facing towards Darjeeling. Ordinary tourists would never get there at all, for it was altogether off the main line, and the guide-books found nothing to say about it. It had indeed no show sights. There was no Indian architecture there which must be seen; there were no historical associations, such as many of the more famous cities of India possess, to attract the attention of those who find their chief interest in a past glory. Nor yet did any industries flourish in it, so that business men would not get that way often either. Indigo had once been grown round about—still was grown in parts, but indigo is no longer what it was, even when it is grown of the finest quality. And here the finest indigo never had been grown. The city's sole

importance was that it represented the capital of a district the size of two of our larger counties, containing a population of two millions of people.

So the Collector had explained, and I woke that first morning after our arrival interested to see it for those very reasons. For while India's ports and big cities, for all their oriental appearance, have become to some extent cosmopolitan, and the military and hill stations are at best Anglo-Indian, this was India without trappings, the real and unmixed Bengal.

It was a morning of brilliant sun, though I had to climb from under a mosquito net, under which I had slept, before I realised it; and the ponies were as fresh as I was for that first ride round the station. The Collector's bungalow was built on grass land two miles outside the city, as indeed were most of the bungalows belonging to the Europeans and Eurasians — not because it made for convenience, but because the city itself was sunk below the level of the roads, apt to be flooded in the rains which breed damp and malaria, impossible therefore for the men who must be in health because they must work throughout the year, and not at haphazard, when fever or inclination lets them. Fifty years before

the officials would have lived in the town, and been more in touch with the inhabitants, and gone out tiger-shooting in grey chimney-pot hats, in the heat of the sun, and kept a dozen elephants for their sport, and drunk port and stout, and lived a merry but short life. Those were the good old days which Anglo-Indians dwell on fondly, but of which it is only a few aspects they wish to renew.

Starting from the bungalow, we rode down avenues very pleasingly grown with trees — mangoes and peepuls and acacias — planted by some beneficent Collector of the past. The deep sandy roads were very pleasant to ride on, just as for walking or for driving they were dreadful, since they had no metalling at all. We came first to the Kutcherry, or Government offices, still a mile from the town, an animated scene even at that comparatively early hour, since outside the court-house there were clerks and policemen bustling, and tum-tums and bullock-carts bringing in witnesses, and petitioners and lawyers and crowds of loiterers and beggars — all assembled in good time, because time to a Bengali has no fixed value, and the law fascinates him as deer are fascinated by a serpent.

The Collector stopped there a few minutes to give some directions to his clerks, and then we made a detour past a recruiting-camp, which was pitched in the middle of a mango grove not far from the jail. The latter was a high-walled but roomy and open building, which I explored a few days afterwards in the company of the Civil surgeon in whose charge it was. I thought it a very pleasant place as prisons go, and certainly a more humane retreat for sinners than anything our scientific reformers can show. In the East there seems more room on the whole than in the West for the exercise of that half-selfish half-charitable feeling which causes a man to feel—with regard to prisons and such places—that there, but for the grace of God, he might be dwelling himself. I suppose some of our scientists would not be altogether happy in an Indian jail; and even the Civil surgeon, who was used to oriental ways, was shocked by an incident that took place while we were going round. I was a little horrified myself, but it was purely physical horror on my part. He had been explaining to me with justifiable pride various improvements that he had effected during his term of office, and I had been complimenting him on their excellence,

when we drew near to the cook-house, in which the prisoners' rice was at the moment being prepared.

"Now here's something you ought to note," he said to me. "Look at that rice. I'm very particular about the food, and that rice is absolutely the best that can be got. It's boiled in those cauldrons that you see there, and this pump from which the cook draws his water communicates with a spring right at the back here. It's completely isolated from the rest of the water supply, so that there's no chance of the food getting contaminated. You must taste the rice for yourself. You won't get any better in India."

"I should like to," I replied, and he called to the cook for two plates of rice, which we partook of amid the admiring gaze of the cook himself, the head jailer, and various criminals who had gathered round. We were indeed in the middle of this feed when the cook's man strolled across the courtyard with a pail of water which I had just seen him fill from some troughs on the other side, and casually poured it into the cauldron in which the rice, the rice we were partaking of, had been cooking. The doctor had not observed

him, and just for the sake of conversation I said—

"What are those troughs over there? Is that another well?"

"Where?" asked the doctor, nibbling at his rice.

"There," I said. "The man is just filling up the cauldron from them."

The doctor's quick eye travelled to the spot and back to the cook's man, and I felt him trying not to swallow some of the rice in his mouth. I suppose it was that which for the moment prevented him from speaking.

"What," he began, "w-what — are you — are you" (then I suppose he swallowed the rice)— "what the devil are you doing?" he thundered.

The cook's man thus turned upon was abashed, and made as if to go away and fetch more water. But the doctor seized him. "Do you mean to tell me," he said, adjuring the chief jailer, the cook, the criminals, and Heaven impartially, "that —that this—this beast has been filling the rice cauldron from — from the troughs the prisoners have just bathed in?"

There was no answer, but I put down my spoon hastily when I realised that there could be no

answer except one in the affirmative, and strolled away regretfully to examine the dormitories, while the doctor explained his emotions to the various officials in a menacing tone. I knew that I had had a good illustration of the way a Bengali grasps reform, but I have not tasted food in a prison since, and feel no wish to.

This about the jail is somewhat by the way, for I did not go inside it that first morning, but rode on with the Collector into the city. We reached it over an old stone bridge whose parapets had been most lightly and beautifully carved, and look ruinous but beautiful now. It crosses the river just before the city is entered from the south — crosses rather what was the river, and seems still to be the river, winding away as it does under the crumbling bridge into the town, but is in fact only the illusion of a river, since in these days the river itself that once wound this way to join the Ganges has found for itself another channel, as all these sand-bearing rivers that pour from the Nepal hills do. And this water that it has left behind in its old bed, between its old banks, is only a dead water that comes to a stop a little further on. The washermen were washing clothes in it; women.

went down to dip in it; ancient temples stood on its banks; a city has grown upon it. But it was no longer a river. Its glory had departed, and with it the glory of the city. There may be other factors too, but these dead rivers account largely for these dead cities which, still densely populated, seem to be decaying before one's eyes. How should it be otherwise? Conceive their case. A town—a city indeed—has grown up on the banks of a fine stream down which boats from up-country can bring produce from far off, and return, taking town-made goods for the villages. And roads are made parallel with it, and bridges built to cross it, and the jungle cleared far and near. Then one morning the inhabitants wake to find that the real river is no longer there, but only a semblance of one, cut off at once from its source and from its union with the greater river that runs to the sea. No more boats will come down it bearing the country things; the boats will go down the new river, leagues away, to some new town that will perhaps spring up on its newly made banks. And those country things that were brought there to be bartered in return for the produce of the town, they will not come by the road either, on the backs

of ponies or camels or in bullock carts,—not for many years,—for in the great flood that made the river change its course much of the land too has been changed, poured over with sand, barren stuff that will lie many feet deep on the ploughed land and grow nothing, it may be, for half a century. These rivers that flood without fertilising, that make swamps or deserts of the land they should irrigate, are alike the fascination and the bane of this country. Engineers have considered the problem they present and washed their hands of it. The expense of regulating their flow is too tremendous. So they flow at their will; and this city stood for an example of what one such river had given and taken away. Obviously it had been a prosperous country town. Between the mud huts that lined its streets there still stood bungalows, brick and stucco, residences of the Georgian period with their Greek pillared verandahs, in whose shade rich merchants had once lived at their ease. Now the chickens ran up and down them, and the little brown children squatted and played squalidly along their dusty floors. It sounds melancholy: in a way it is melancholy. A city's pride fallen, its prosperity gone to the wall, the enterprise of

many generations made vain by a sort of inexorable fatality — things of this sort would make for gloom in the West, for gloom and perhaps for a renewal of pride and enterprise. But India, though she may be ready to lie inert in the dust and ruin of past splendours, does not sink to melancholy. The feeling of gloom does not make itself felt there. On the contrary, an indescribable animation seems to permeate the most apathetic parts. I do not know what it is—the animation of crowdedness, perhaps. The poorest and most forsaken village seems to buzz with it. So, coming upon some bare and hollow stump in a wintry wood which seems most stricken and desolate, you may suddenly become aware of a ceaseless hum, and know that bees have hived there, and that the place is full of a multitudinous life.

There was a main street through the town where the stuccoed buildings and the mud huts stood side by side. The open fronts of the bazaar shops half revealed and half concealed the goods that were for sale and the private life of the shop-keeper. There were few good things to be bought, and the bulk of them did not look to be Indian but German or Brummagem. Still, the bazaar too, poor as were

the goods sold there, was full of animation, and the people exchanging pice for rubbish were keen enough on their transactions. We stopped at one place in the bazaar, a little open-air cupboard it was, where the solitary surviving industry of the city was carried on. This industry was the inlaying of silver on copper, and three old men, each nearly blind, were the only craftsmen left. One of them was working there, squatted on the ground, with a great pair of horn spectacles on his nose, a small hammer in one hand, a large nail in the other, the copper and the silver on the ground beside him. The hammer and the nail were all the tools he used. With these he picked out his intricate pattern on the copper and then beat the shredded silver into it. It was highly skilled work and the results were very beautiful, but the fineness of it, and the patience and the time required for it, made it too expensive in these days of cheap art. Moreover, it seemed to result in dimness of sight. The three old men were all of them nearly blind, and since they could get no apprentices to carry on their work, it seemed unlikely that it would last for many years longer.

A stout Bengali tradesman to whom the workshop belonged and for whom the old men worked

explained these facts to us and exhibited some of their finished pieces, and bargained with us for the price of an example, and all the while the old man hammered softly and assiduously at a lump of copper, peering at it through his horn glasses and sliding now and then an old brown sensitive finger along the groove he had chased. Artists, I fancy, are more industrious and equable in the East than in the West, but they have at least this connecting link, that there is always a fat tradesman ready to sell their work at a bargain to the public.

Riding on through the narrow streets, dusty and full of rubbish, I was astonished to find them so odourless, but the Collector explained to me that there was a good drainage system and that the sun soaks up all surface smells. We passed, in this decaying city, no less than three temples and two mosques, themselves equally, as it seemed, decaying. Yet it was not so. As in the city itself, as perhaps in all India, in all the East, the exterior may crumble, but the heart of things is untouched. Within were the priests, sleek and self-possessed, and the objects of worship, coarse and splendid. The temple bells rang and the calls to worship and the ceremonies continued as if nothing had changed, as if history were nothing and prosperity

nothing and progress nothing, and only the ancient ritual and the old incurious faith the things that mattered.

The next time I saw these temples it was in the company of an Englishman who held the not uncommon view that Christian missions in India were a failure, together with a much rarer view, namely, that Christianity ought forcibly to be imposed upon the peoples of India. I believe that a proposal to this effect was laid before the British Government in India at the end of the Mutiny by an English Colonel. Probably very few people at home knew of it or ever heard of it. It was a serious document, in which the Colonel pointed out that this was the psychological moment for imposing Christianity on a conquered foe. Government should replace the priests with chaplains, convert the temples into churches, and proclaim the new state religion throughout the country—as a result of which India would, in a very short time, be a Christian and God-fearing country. His plan was not, I suppose, considered feasible: it was probably even considered reprehensible. Reprehensible or not, my friend held that it was a statesmanlike suggestion. There might, he said, have been trouble with the Allied States; unmuscular Christ-

ians might have made objections; there was always the risk of persecution causing the church to grow, but in his view that risk was a slight one. History, he maintained, does not show that persecution causes every church to grow. What of the aboriginal religions of Bengal? They were swept away by the conquering Aryans. The Hindoo religion was imposed upon a conquered people. Tolerance, he added, is an impossible virtue for those who rule by the sword. Have we for our part scrupled to give the death-blow to some of the African religions with their bloody rituals and debasing worships? Have they ever shown any signs of growing in the shadow of our hostility? And might not Hindooism, appealing for the most part to man's lower nature, miserably separating morality from conduct, faith from works, have by a firm and sudden policy likewise been swept away? It should have been. Tolerated, it yet feels itself persecuted; cherished, it is always in revolt; protected, its priests know no gratitude and never cease from plotting against their protectors. Always too, as things are, religious antipathy, stronger far than race hatred, keeps apart the ruled and the rulers.

I do not know what the experts think of

this view. The hour when it might have been tried passed and will not soon come again. Meanwhile Brahmanism prevails and the caste system holds India in a tight grip, making a mock of Western analogies and deriding Western civilisation. Christianity might not have been imposable generally: it would have been the less Christianity if it had been imposed. But at least it would not have been ignored.

We came back—the Englishman who held these unconventional views (he was not an official) and I—from our visit to the temple past a sacred banyan tree that stands a little outside the city. The banyan is like Milton's fig-tree—

> "Branching so broad and long that on the ground
> The bended twigs take root and daughters grow
> About the mother tree, a pillared shade . . ."

This being a sacred banyan, was hung with votive bricks, placed there to indicate by their respective weights and sizes the amount of the offerings that the worshipper guaranteed to contribute to the priest, who had a little dwelling in the pillared shade, as soon as their prayers should have been answered. The priest came out from his hut as we stood there and asked

for an alms. My friend explained that he was a Christian and saw no reason for contributing to the upkeep of a religion that was hostile to his own. The old priest again asked for an alms. My friend said would he, the Brahmin, if an alms were given him, make in return some contribution to be used for the Christian church? The old man's face went vacant and he stalked back to his hut disgusted.

Yet we do leave some marks of ourselves even upon Bengal. At least I suppose so. The following week I had the pleasure of being shown the town, in its municipal aspect, by one of its leading Indians. He was a barrister, a town councillor, a prop and pillar of all sorts of local committees and organisations. He was a youngish man, slim and smart, full of courtesy and self-possession. He came to fetch me in his buggy, a fine turnout, with a syce behind and a showy country pony in front, with a magnificent action and a very slow trot. A Bengali has the feeling, I think, that if a horse has a fine action, it should not go too fast: otherwise people will not be able to notice what a magnificent beast it is. The Babu took me to the hospital first. It was a pleasant clean-looking building, standing clear

of the city; and we viewed the cots and the dispensary and the operating tables, and the Babu was extremely apologetic because there were no patients to be set forth for my inspection.

"I cannot think why it is," he said aggrievedly to the dispensary assistant; "last month there were twelve cases in the hospital."

"Yes," replied the dispenser, "but now there are none."

"But why is that?" enquired the Babu.

"They were, for most part, short cases."

"Even that woman who crushed her leg and had to have the amputation?" suggested the Babu.

"Yes. Her husband fetched her and she might not stay longer."

"And the child that was badly burned in the head?"

"It effected recovery," said the dispenser apologetically, "and was sent back last week."

"A pity," said the Babu, and turned to me with the most genuine regret. "Now I am really sorry about this."

"It doesn't really matter a bit," I assured him; "it just shows how quickly patients recover in such a pleasant hospital."

"There is that," he agreed, "yes—there is that. Only this year it was repainted at large cost. It is a very pleasant hospital. Now we go to the Town Hall—yes?"

I said that I should be delighted to go to the Town Hall, and we drove there accordingly, and the Babu showed me all over its very fine and spacious interior, whose rafters, though comparatively new, had already rung with many magnificent orations. He also showed me the library in another room. It contained a varied assortment of books and back numbers of several English magazines. He was particularly proud of the English magazines.

"It is very nice," he explained to me, "to have the English magazines like that. One can keep in touch with the things of England. Yes." He turned over one or two copies as he spoke. "I see that now they are taking in the 'Fortnightly Review.' When I was chairman we took in the 'Strand Magazine.' It was very interesting. But I think that the 'Fortnightly' is interesting too. All the English magazines are very interesting."

To what extent a course of the 'Strand Magazine,' followed by a course of the 'Fortnightly,' made

the English point of view coherent to the town councillors, it was never given to me to ascertain. I saw a good many of them later on at a meeting convened for deciding to what extent famine relief was necessary in some of the outlying parts of the district. About twenty councillors were present—mostly barristers or large land-holders in the neighbourhood. Some of them were impressive-looking men, and they all made impressive-sounding speeches. They used two or three different tongues, all unknown to me; but the way words and hands were flung to the ceiling, the way voices were raised and sunk, seemed to indicate a great deal of eloquence and emotion. The Collector, who presided, told me that they were as a matter of fact most excellent speeches, and contained some capital suggestions as to how land-owners should help their tenants and distribute supplies in the outlying districts in the event of an emergency. Severer critics in other parts have, however, assured me that a weakness reveals itself when the carrying out of such proposals becomes necessary. Some of the speakers omit to render the assistance they have so generously and capably outlined, and the actual work falls far too often

upon the permanent officials. Even if such critics be right, there is still no reason to object to the Municipal Councils. At the worst the Town Hall is a place where rhetoric of all sorts is poured forth to a limited and not too emotional audience, great schemes involving enormous expenditure of non-existent public monies are discussed and not passed, public-spirited resolutions, brought forward by persons who in private life may possibly be lacking in magnanimity, are satisfactorily immortalised in the minutes.

And Bengal is not the only place where honorary politicians are at times more qualified for debate than for action; where men find that rhetoric is not the talent most suited to an emergency. Bengal again is not the only place where a Town Hall appears occasionally to give no outward and visible sign of its inward importance, where it is not surrounded by a crowd, eager to know what its representatives are doing within, where it is not pointed out as the mainspring and glory of the city. Still, no Town Hall that I ever saw struck me as quite so dull or so completely ignored by its citizens as this one. It was large and vacant-looking. It might almost have been haunted by ancient and

meaningless spirits rather than by modern and practical County Councillors. Elsewhere there was always that strange animation I have spoken of. Outside the Courts of Justice there was always an interested throng; in the bazaar there was a perpetual gentle hum; along the course of the dead river there were always people splashing and washing animatedly. But in all the rides I took I never saw the Town Hall drawing the people. It was as though these other things—the day's work, shopping, and the processes of justice—could stir these Bengalis, however apathetic they might be; and as though Local Government—by the people for the people—had no interest for them. Some day perhaps it will. Some day perhaps that dead river will run again to the sea. But will there be a caste system then, separating the chosen from the pariahs? Will the people still be encouraged to hang their votive offerings to the boughs of the banyan tree so that their children may become yet more innumerable and bring more offerings to those who work only with their wits? Will corruptibility still be the universal undiscoverable thing it is? At their appointed hours, will the temple bells still be ringing?

CHAPTER III.

A CAMP NEAR THE PELICANS.

If I were asked—what is the chief charm of Bengal, I should say the jungle. But if I were asked why, I should be less ready to answer. As with persons, so with countries—their leading features are easily written down; their beauties are not difficult to name; but their charm—there at once is the incommunicable thing. A thousand details go to its making. Each by itself seems small and unworthy. How can the whole be told all at once?

When I think back to the jungle, I remember many different scenes—tangled forests flaming with scarlet flowers; huge seas of grass, silent and motionless, or broken by the sudden violent grunt of a pig that vanishes leaving only a wake such as a water-rat leaves on the surface of a stream; deep silver channels of sand that seem in flux like the

waters that once poured down them; crystal rivers bobbed about with dolphins; endless reedy meres and black pools netted with water-lilies; golden hazes. And, among them, people—silent brown people who, as you come unexpectedly on them, salaam silently, gaze mildly for a little and go on with their patient apathetic toil, cutting a handful of grass from the edge of a prairie, setting their prehistoric nets in waters that are here to-day and gone to-morrow, aimlessly subduing the jungle and aimlessly subdued by it, seeming to hope nothing and to believe all things.

I think it is one of the jungle's fascinations that, appearing to be remote and untrodden by men, it has always this human population that not merely roams through it or uses it for hunting and trapping as the Red Indians use the forests of the New World—but lives in it and by it, and has so lived for centuries. They are easily evaded. You can go a day's ride into the jungle and see none of them. But they are there—an orderly folk amongst all this wildness—curiously amenable to laws they have never heard of which were made for them in a country fantastically remote from their own and wholeheartedly unlike it.

I saw the jungle very soon after our arrival.

The Collector had some inspections to make, and he had postponed going into camp for a day or two in case I cared to go with him. Therefore, when I had had a couple of rides and shown myself capable of appreciating both the mare and the mid-day sun, he proposed we should set out the day following to a first camp thirty miles away. Our bags and tents were driven off overnight in bullock carts; and about seven o'clock in the morning, after an early tea, we were ourselves on the way. Three miles walking and trotting and we came to a ferry which crossed another piece of that dead river that forms a moat to the city. Only this piece was broader and deeper, and there was no bridge to it. The ferrymen were waiting for us, and put us across quickly enough, once my mare had been persuaded that their flat-bottomed craft with the bilge water swishing about in the bottom was not going to consign her to the deep ooze and the crocodiles. Not that any crocodiles were visible at this crossing, which was a much used one and too noisy for these peace-loving body-snatchers. But she had spent two or three years of her life in Bengal, and had seen the brutes and perhaps smelt them, and that was enough always to set her nerves on edge when

she had to commit herself to water passages. From the ferry we cantered eight or nine miles through an open country of burnt earth and burnt grass, that stretched endlessly on both sides of the road, save where a thin patch of bamboo broke the monotony with its feathery grey-green foliage, until we came to a dip in which lay yet another piece of dead river. It was limpid and sandy bottomed, and we forded it, riding in the wake of the ferryman who, having girded himself to the waist, led us by a devious but shallow route to the other side. Another hour's riding brought us to a real river, also clear, but deeper and swift-flowing. It appeared that on the other side of this a change of ponies, borrowed from a man whom we were to meet later, was waiting for us. But on this side was one of the Collector's syces, who had been sent ahead with our guns and a luncheon-basket, and he announced that on a sandbank, half a mile up the stream, there were teal sitting. Teal was his generic term for water-birds, and on inspection they turned out to be two brahminy ducks—those handsome but shifty natives of Bengal—and a flock of grey geese. We had done the first stage rather quicker than we expected to, so, leaving the ponies to the syce's

care, and relieving him of the guns and the lunch-basket, we invited the ferrymen to take us across the river *vid* that sandbank half a mile upstream. Fortunately they possessed, in addition to the ferry-boat proper, which was a vast and cumbrous ark, a smaller boat which proved to be propellible upstream at a moderate pace. I have called it a boat, but it looked more like some old-fashioned receptacle for water which was beginning to fall to pieces. It still held water—about a foot of it—which could not be drained out: seeing which, the ferrymen filled it up instead with dried grass, upon which they proceeded to lay two pieces of packing case to form seats. On these we took our places while they stood and poled at either end, so indefatigably that in less than half an hour we got our one and only shot at the grey geese, bringing down four. There was no getting within range a second time; so we turned and went swiftly down to the landing-place on the other side, and arrived wet only to the knee. We had lunch on the shady side of the ferryman's hut—not inside it, for reasons that the Collector said are apt to become too obvious; and after a smoke started to do the last part of the dak. I found myself mounted on an elephant of a country pony, which carried me at an elephant's

jog through the jungle that ensued. We must have ridden for the best part of an hour along a sandy footpath walled in on both sides by grass ten feet high, and I was not sorry at the end of it to come to more varied country where the jungle grass gave way to groves of bamboo and mango, and we passed little villages where the thatched roofs were red with chillies set up there to dry, and gourds grew up the mud walls, and there were small gardens of tobacco, and fields of mustard, dazzlingly yellow. Pigs and chickens and tawny-haired naked children mingled in the dusty alleys that linked the cottages together; and if on the outskirts there was a great open-air tank of water held in by high mud banks, there would generally be some women washing, and a dhobie bird flapping round. The Collector pointed out that this was a rich part of the country; but we came to a sandier poorer part again during the last hour's ride, which ended on a great open piece of grass-land where the tents were pitched.

The camp had been chosen by the man who had lent us the ponies, and he said it was the breeziest to be found anywhere round. He was himself camping there, collecting rents for the Rajah for whom he acted as manager. He was an English-

man, cheery and hale, though he had not been out of Bengal since the day he came to it, a boy from a public school, twenty-five years before. He had started as an assistant indigo-planter, just as public school boys start now in other parts of India and Ceylon as assistant managers in tea gardens. If he had started twenty years earlier he might have been a wealthy man, but the Germans found that something very like indigo—and not to be distinguished from it by a world that likes things cheap—could be manufactured chemically in Germany, and sold for swords and ships and the right to bluster. So he had not made his fortune. But he had shot many tigers and stuck many pigs, and knew the jungle through and through, and for my part I found myself envying him. His tents adjoined ours, and after tea and a hot bath we went over to him and were given a twelve course dinner. It sounds uncamp-like; but then camping in Bengal in the cold weather is not devoid of luxuries. A tent divided into bedroom, bathroom, and verandah, hot water when wanted, meals cooked by a chef (the more chef in that his stove is a series of charcoal fires kindled in holes in the ground), ponies and elephants to carry oneself, and bullock carts to

carry one's baggage—these are things that the pioneer or even the holiday-maker of other countries might sniff at as savouring unduly of ease and complexity. It has to be borne in mind that Bengal is not all cold weather, and that camping there is seldom done for holiday purposes and the plain delights of shooting or fishing. Officials are obliged to camp out many weeks in the year, and must in course of their camping inspect crops and buildings and people, go through long books of accounts, try cases, consider petitions, and get through much other work that is in cooler countries done at regular hours in an office. The tent has to be the office. The official has to work at full steam in weather often more than sultry after rides in the grinding sun that no one for choice would undertake. His sport is done in intervals, and if work presses is not done at all. The work is always done.

Still it is not to be denied that for idlers like myself camping in Bengal is sheer luxury, or that this first camp was anything but a foretaste of the happy hunting grounds that our ancestors looked for hereafter. Our host said at dinner that we were in luck, in that, while the district was often dried up, the last heavy

rains of the season had left an enormous chain of jheels three miles to the south, where duck were plentiful. There were also plenty of hog-deer in the jungle, if we could get at them. The elephants he had brought with him were at our service whenever we cared for them. It was the hog-deer we first went after, when the Collector had a spare half-day. The season for them is later, when the villagers have fired the jungle, and you come upon the little squat deer in the burnt patches where the new grass is beginning to sprout. We found no open patches at all. For the greater part of the afternoon we were going through grass that came well above my gun held upright as I sat on the pad of the elephant. Pigs bolted before us every now and then, the waving grass showing their zigzag escape; but we saw no deer till the late afternoon, when I missed one. I saw it only for an instant, but felt certain that it was a hog-deer and that I had hit it. Perhaps that was a too vain-glorious thought for a more than indifferent shot. Even a good one can find himself at fault the first day on a pad, when the struggle to stay on at the critical moment and not blow off the mahout's head is one that calls

for a determined effort. Anyway the mahout said that I had missed the hog-deer. He spoke tersely, as though I had not missed him too. I deferred to his greater experience, and was not sure whether to be gratified or the reverse the next morning when an old grizzled headed Bengali turned up before our tent, salaaming deeply, and said the Sahib had shot one of his buffalo calves. I think I was gratified. After all a small buffalo calf is not unlike a hog-deer —to a new-comer—and the creature had fled swiftly. I felt disposed to remunerate the old man, who said he was very poor and would be ruined by the loss of his calf. But the Collector struck in.

"How," he asked, "can such a very young buffalo as you describe have been straying in the middle of the jungle?"

The old man entered into a long geographical description of the district, intended to show that the middle of the jungle was not the middle of the jungle, but the edge. He added, moreover, that the calf was not so very small, but on the contrary a fine well-grown calf.

"In that case," demanded the Collector, "how could the Sahib have mistaken it for a hog-deer?"

The old man did not accept that view at all. The Sahib, he thought, had probably shot at a hog-deer, but had hit his calf which was standing near instead (I sympathised with the old man less after this).

"It's body then lies on the edge of the jungle," said the Collector.

"Yes. Soon the vultures will have it," said the old man.

"Why, then," asked the Collector, "have you not brought the body along with you as evidence of its death?"

The old man bowed himself low. He had thought of that, but he was infirm and very aged. In his younger days he could have carried the calf. But not now; and a bullock-cart he did not possess; otherwise he would most certainly have brought the body to show to his excellency. The Collector did not seem altogether satisfied with this pathetic statement, but admitted that it might be true, and said that if on further enquiry it turned out that the truth had been spoken, the old man should be compensated. Half an hour later our camp neighbour came round to breakfast, and we told him the old man's story. He began to laugh.

"I think I know the old chap" he said. "Last time I camped here, I went out after deer with three other men and he put in a claim for four calves. The bodies were not to be found. They never are. One of the men with me told me that he paid the old man for two calves only the year before. There's just enough in the story to delude the innocent."

"I must admit," I said modestly, "that I certainly thought I hit whatever it was that I aimed at."

"What did the mahout think?" asked our guest.

"He thought I missed it," I said.

"Of course he may have thought it a bother to go after it, but—he's fairly cute."

Therewith my hog-deer vanished into the limbo of thoughts that were fathered by wishes and never attained the reality even of Nelson's partridge. We tried the jheels on the following day. The road the mahouts took us was by many mustard fields and down the dry channel of an old river to another grass jungle on the edge of which lay a Santhal village. The Santhals' own country is many miles away among hills not even to be seen from here, but they are great colonists,

welcomed by the officials for their zeal in farming country which the apathetic Bengali shrinks from, and, incidentally, for their merry smiling faces. The Santhals are, compared with the Bengalis, a black people, and black people smile where the brown only draw long faces. The Collector had served in the Santhals' country, and coming upon an elderly man who was alone in a field swinging round and round his head what looked like a burning beehive fastened to a stick (it was in reality a censer of sorts in which he was thus burning charcoal for his hookah), he bethought himself of the Santhals' famous dances, and how it would be pleasant to see them again. He asked the elderly man then who was the head man of the village, and the elderly man stopped whirling his fire-globe and said that the head man was himself, and who was the Sahib? The Collector explained who he was, and said that his camp was at no great distance, and that if the Santhals of the village were willing to come round in the evening and dance before it there would be Sahibs to appreciate it and also baksheesh for all. The head man grinned very pleasantly and said that if the Santhals felt like it, they would come that evening and dance before his Excellency's tent:

but if they did not feel like it, they would not come. Then he went on whirling his blazing beehive, and the Collector ordered the mahouts to move forward and said to me what a blessing it was in Bengal sometimes to come upon people who could show an independent spirit. Not long after, we reached the first of the jheels. It was the beginning of swamps and meres so clustered about with great reeds that, though they stretched for many miles, we could only see the first. Descending from the elephants, whose feet had already begun to squelch through the damp ground that sent up fetid odours, we found ourselves knee-deep in water, so hemmed about with reeds that the jheel itself that we had seen from the pad had vanished. However, we knew its direction, and had seen the duck upon it, and a few minutes later, having timed ourselves to get by separate ways simultaneously to the edge of the jheel, we were firing almost together. It was the only time that day that we took the duck unawares. They did not see us behind the reeds, and came back twice. The difficulty was to recover the fallen birds, for the water into which they fell varied in depth and was laced with clinging plants that made swimming impossible. Also, it was

a haunt of crocodiles. I did not realise that until I was walking, or rather paddling back to my elephant, when I passed within two yards of one —the first I had seen wild. It lay half out of the water, on a bed of crushed reeds—not a large crocodile, but large enough to make me tread the rest of the way with extremely self-conscious toes. Our difficulty during the rest of the day was to get anywhere near the birds. The reedy pools gave way to immense stretches of water, to which there was no approach except along their low sandy shores. In the end we tried beating with elephants. This was down a long arm of water which looked like the estuary of a considerable river, and was, I suppose, a mile in width and two miles in length. Birds of every sort were crowded upon it. We sent the two elephants by a detour to the far end, and waited ourselves, one on each side, some half way down. It was a fine sight, as the two elephants advanced trumpeting, each also taking a side and keeping level, to see the birds rise. There were ducks and teal and geese and cranes and coots and cormorants and others that I had never set eyes on before. Each flock as it rose seemed a pell-mell mass of birds vainly beating the air until, sud-

denly, the training, or habit, or instinct, or whatever it is that moves the bird race in an emergency, asserted itself, and the scattered flight—the *sauve qui peut* of the winged things—turned in an instant to an ordered retreat that was formed in crescent or in line or in column that rose higher and higher and flew faster and faster, wheeling this way and that as their leaders directed, who looked for some place of safety, and that not too far from the base of supplies. As the elephants marched on, regiment after regiment, battalion after battalion whirred into the sky, so that it was like a great treeless plain dotted with the units of an innumerable army. Backwards and forwards they flew, mostly so high up that a shot was not possible, though I fired once or twice to see what the effect would be upon their complicated evolutions. Only the native birds flew low and not far—the brahminys and the egrets and the dhobins and suchlike. I did not see the pelicans on this jheel, but on another lying at right angles to it, to which I wandered by myself, while the Collector was busy shooting duck. They lay a hundred yards from the edge—great white birds, that looked almost too heavy to float. Yet compared with the ducks that lay alongside, they

floated as high out of the water as did the old Spanish galleons compared with the English ships. There were about a hundred of them, and they did not pay the least heed to my presence until I fired a shot into the air. Then they acknowledged a certain anxiety by rising with a majestic slowness,—the ducks had sped off on the instant,—hovering collectedly over their late anchorage, and so, as if disdaining to be altogether afraid, rumbling off through the air right over my head, two hundred feet up. Looking at them as they passed I had almost the feeling that aeroplanes give nowadays, and wondered where I should be if one of them fell and came crashing down upon me.

We started home at sunset, none too soon, for we had some miles of swamp to retraverse, and elephants are always peculiarly cautious and slow in passing through bog-land. It is not to be wondered at. An unwary step and they might be stuck indefinitely in the quaking mud. We got back to camp in the dark, very ready for dinner and the sleep that should ensue after a peaceful hour's smoking. It was a cool night, and a wood fire had been lighted just outside our tent, in the open, so that we might sit out

and yet be warm. We were sitting out, and I myself was beginning to doze when upon the night air there sounded suddenly a distant noise as of drums and fifes. It was a pleasant noise, no way disruptive of sleep, though it certainly sounded to be coming slowly nearer. A minute or two later the Collector sat up and said—

"By Jove—the Santhals! I'd forgotten about them. They're coming to dance by invitation. They'll dance for hours."

Presently they came, still playing. The whole village except perhaps the children in arms must have turned out. There were seven musicians, or rather seven musical instruments which only one man at a time could play. Four of these were tom-toms, and for these there were shifts of players, who relieved one another when the pounding became too severe for them. The other three instruments were single-stringed violins which looked as if they had been cut from the solid wood with an axe. These made a noise as of a very large kettle singing. The violinists were men, but arrayed in fantastic female costume. Supported by the tom-toms they took up a position almost in the ashes of our wood fire, and the women and maidens of

the village, some thirty in all, linked arms and stood in two lines immediately behind. About an equal number of men grouped themselves on the outside, and a dozen or more who did not take part squatted themselves on the ground as near the fire as they could get. The headman came forward to where we sat and announced simply—

"The Santhals have come to dance."

"Good," said the Collector, desperately, "let them dance."

Then the dance began. Santhal dances are extraordinarily ancient and interesting and allusive, but they have been described before now by experts, with whom I should not attempt to compete. In any case, for us, the dance only began. It took about three hours to begin. During all this time the tom-toms and the tea-kettles were played without cessation, and the linked women and maidens stood in a line and did some ankle exercises combined with a slight —very slight—swaying of the body. They were making themselves supple for the wild dances that were to follow. It was extraordinarily philistine of us, confronted with this rare and absorbing spectacle, to grow drowsier and

drowsier. I think with shame upon it still. But we had been out in the heat of the sun, mostly wading and walking, for nine hours, and the drone of the music was soporific in the extreme. I roused myself once to go and get a box of cheroots, which I distributed among the Santhal men, giving them a cheroot each. They received them with polite smiles, and every man began smoking his gift at once. A few moments later I noticed that none of them were smoking, or to be correct only one man. The rest had put their cheroots out and each wore one behind his ear. I thought at first that they did not care for those cheroots (I did not blame them) but were too polite to say so; or that they were unused to smoking and found it safer after a few whiffs to carry them behind the ear rather than between the lips. I was mistaken. The lighting up of all the cheroots had been a piece of the purest politeness, which was followed directly after by a natural assertion of the instinct of thrift. That twenty cigars should be smoked at once was, it seemed, an extravagance the Santhals could not endure. One was enough. Each man in turn took a whiff of it, and as he drew the smoke into his throat and nose, swiftly

passed the cheroot to his neighbour, who did likewise. Thus the air which in the usual way receives so much good smoke was robbed of it. A lesson in thrift, but not, I fear, one that cigar smokers in general are likely to benefit by.

Shortly after midnight, the Collector drew us aside and asked us plainly what we should like done. The dew was falling heavily, there was no wood for the replenishment of the camp fire, and still the musicians droned and the maidens swayed slightly. We thought and said it was a case for tact, and the Collector accordingly sent for the head man.

"The dance," he said, "has been very beautiful, but it now becomes late."

"It is night," said the head man, "but as yet the Santhals have not begun properly to dance. What they do is only the initiation. Santhals are capable of dancing for two nights and days and more."

"The Santhals," returned the Collector, "are very great dancers. We know it. To watch them dancing for two days and two nights would cause us much delight. Unfortunately, very early in the morning we have to move our camp."

The head man said that it was a very great

pity, as the Santhals were worked up for the dance, and were now quite ready to dance before the Sahibs without any baksheesh. They would rather continue to dance than receive baksheesh.

The Collector replied that he quite understood and appreciated the friendliness of the Santhals, but they must certainly receive baksheesh, and also, alas, the Sahibs must sleep for a short time before they moved camp.

Very regretfully the head man said that if that were the case he would instruct the Santhals only to finish the first part of their dance. After which they would return to their village.

They finished some three-quarters of an hour later, and went off full of regrets, but most friendly and courteous. They marched away as they had come to the music of the tom-toms and the violins. Very slowly the sound of them grew fainter, but I could still hear it as I turned over on my pillow and settled down to an irresistible sleep.

CHAPTER IV.

THE COLLECTOR AND THE TIGER.

I SAW my first tiger in a scrub-jungle two miles from the Nepal frontier. We were still out camping—the Collector and I—making an inspection of the more remote police "thanas" or outposts, and the day before, under a brilliant January sun, we had ridden twenty miles from one to another along the ploughed fields and grassy wastes, intersected with river-courses, some old, some new, some dried-up, some brimming with limpid water, that make this less-known portion of Bengal at once so monotonous and so fascinating. In the end we came to what was a unique formation for that part—a low inland cliff. There we found our tents pitched just over the dried bed of a stream, and a native sub-inspector of police awaiting us in the dreadful mustard-coloured uniform and pork-pie cap

which the Government has ordained for these frequently fat servants.

He was a wily man, this sub-inspector. There had been many dacoities in the neighbourhood, and it was the Collector's business to demand, in a cold-blooded and menacing manner, why the police had apparently done nothing to stop them. Did the sub-inspector suppose that he was stationed there just in order to enjoy himself? Or was he perhaps in league with the dacoits? What had he to say about the matter?

The sub-inspector had a great deal to say, and not over-much English to say it in. Still that never depresses a native. He begged his Honour most respectfully to believe that the sole thing he really cared about in this world was the performance of his duty. Only the district he had to inspect was a large one—forty miles by thirty. His Honour was mistaken in thinking it smaller. Or the map might be wrong. In any case there were many villages in it — countless villages, full of timid people who, if a dacoity occurred, did not help the police at all. They were afraid to. That was because the dacoits could so easily be avenged on them. In a few hours of the night

they could come over from Nepal territory, fall upon witnesses and kill them, and return before dawn. They were the most audacious men. Only two days ago they had actually stolen an elephant—a valuable female elephant belonging to a Babu who lived close by—and had gone off with it. Such a thing was unheard of.

The Collector interposed to say that this was exactly what he thought himself. Such a thing was not only unheard of, but if heard of again would suggest the inference that the sub-inspector was grossly neglecting his duty, and would require to be removed. Thereupon the sub-inspector's face fell, and only lighted up after the Collector, having given one of those brief lectures, at once moral and practical, which only Anglo-Indian officials of experience can give, — in this case, upon the method of following up clues and the need of eschewing idleness, — inquired if there was any shikar in the neighbourhood.

You can impress a native, but you cannot beguile him. I was watching the sub-inspector's face as the Collector put that question quite dispassionately, and I could see flashing over it the idea that the Collector was a great hunter,

that of all things the Sahib loves most to shoot a big bagh, and that if he were the means of putting his Honour on the track of a big bagh, which would then assuredly be killed, he would be remembered by his Honour not as a policeman who had failed badly to catch dacoits, but as one who had helped intelligently to set before him a tiger. All men, says the East, are corruptible; and here, thought the sub-inspector, was the Collector's weak point.

"There is undoubtedly a bagh near by," he said after a pause. "A big bagh,"—he measured the air with his hand up to about six feet.

"How do you know?" said the Collector.

"Only a month ago a cow was taken two miles from where your Honour's tents stand."

"What is the good," asked the Collector, "of telling me that a cow was taken a month ago? The bagh that took it may have travelled fifty miles since then!"

"But, your Honour," said the sub-inspector, with the readiness verbally to retrieve a mistake which is again so Oriental, "another cow was taken the night before last."

"Only you forgot to mention it?"

"I was about to mention it," said the sub-

inspector. "It was a full-grown cow, and was dragged some distance."

"By a panther, no doubt?" said the Collector jeeringly.

"By a big bagh," said the sub-inspector with great seriousness, — "so big, that it is like a horse." He measured the air up to eight feet. "People in the village have seen it. There are many small baghs, too,—panthers,—but this is a big one. Very big. It is bigger than a horse. Your Honour will go after it, perhaps, to-morrow morning?"

"Yes—if you find some tic kabbar," said the Collector. "But it must be tic."

The sub-inspector went off, saying it should be very tic indeed. "Tic" means accurate, and it therefore means what some natives are weak in. Nevertheless, as the Collector said, it would be worth trying for a tiger if the jungle was not too thick. Tigers are not so plentiful in Bengal nowadays (except, of course, in the Sunderbunds, where the trees are so dense, and the air so pestilent that hunting is about 90 per cent in favour of the tiger) that one can afford to miss a chance, and this part of the district was reported to contain a few. At all events, we might

get a leopard. Unlike tigers, leopards (usually known as panthers) are increasing all over the country. They can conceal themselves in any patch of grass, whereas the tiger cannot, and seems to resent the gradual cutting down of forests that made his once impenetrable home. Where he still survives up-country is in some stretch of tree-jungle that can scarcely be beaten with fewer than twenty or thirty elephants. Unluckily no more of these were to be obtained by us than the two that happened to be yet with us, after having brought on some of our camp outfit. Two, however, were better than none, and a third was eventually added to us by the good offices of the sub-inspector. Having vouched for the presence of a tiger, he seemed determined that at least all due preparations should be made for its extinction. He had sent out three watchmen to ascertain if any more cows had been killed; and himself turned up at our tents later that same evening to say that, if his Honour was willing, two Babus — the schoolmaster of the village and the nephew of a Zemindar—would be gratified if they were allowed to join the expedition, bringing their own elephant.

"They are here outside, waiting to hear if your

Honour permits," said the sub-inspector, waving into the darkness, where we could dimly see two bowing figures in the flimsy draperies that Babus affect.

"Are they in the habit of hunting?" asked the Collector.

The two figures moved up to the flap doorway of the tent.

"We shoot the panther," said two voices in unison. "We do not of ourselves shoot the tiger."

"Why not?" asked the Collector.

"Why not?" repeated the sub-inspector, and there were some murmured explanations between the three of them. Then the sub-inspector announced—

"Your Honour, they do not shoot the tiger because they are cordy men."

"Cordy?"

"Cordy, your Honour."

The Collector did not understand, and looked towards me. I shook my head. The word, apparently an English one, was new to me.

"What do you mean by cordy?" demanded the Collector.

"I mean," the sub-inspector beat about for

what he did mean,—"I mean—I mean—cordy. It is that they are cordy — they fear the tiger."

"Cowardly!" said the Collector with sudden inspiration, and the two Babus, who had pressed forward into our lamplight in their anxiety not to be misunderstood, smiled assentingly. The Collector also smiled, and they deemed the moment favourable.

"Yes, we are cordy," said one of them, "but in your Honour's company we should not fear. We may come?"

"All right," said the Collector. "Only mind you don't hold your guns in my direction."

It seemed rather a blunt way of forewarning members of one's shooting party, but, as the Collector explained to me after the Babus had departed, it is necessary. For choice they will always hold their guns at a fellow-creature. This makes hunting on a pad elephant nervous work. A lurch or a jib on the part of the elephant faced suddenly by a wounded tiger, and a wild clutch at the pad-rope on the part of the Babu, will sometimes cause his gun to go off in any direction rather than the tiger's, especially if the Babu happens to be holding it by the trigger. In

taking risks of this kind the Babu is fearless enough, but the Sahib less so.

The Collector was so very much less so that on the following morning, before we started at about nine o'clock, he disarmed the Babus of two revolvers which they had brought with them in addition to their guns (one of which was muzzle-loading), in case the tiger came to close quarters; but I do not fancy they minded the confiscation, and the sub-inspector, who was to come with us, very much approved of it. He rode our spare elephant together with one of the Collector's chuprassies, both armed for the nonce with shot-guns, and he kept shouting directions to the Babus how to hold their weapons until the Collector abashed him—for a moment or two—by pointing out that while he was discovering the mote in the Babus' eye—so to speak—his own gun was pointed full at the head of the unfortunate chuprassie behind him. After that the sub-inspector contented himself with instructing the mahout how to drive his elephant.

It was a perfect day of North Indian winter, the sky blue and fleckless to the horizon, the sun beginning to blaze, the air still cool. From

our cliff a long view of the plains extended, broken here and there by clumps of bamboo and mango groves. Through distant silvery sands rivers still more silvery meandered, and tiny cattle dotted the bare brown fields. As we started north along the edge of the cliff, a cloud of parrots burst from a tree overhead, and made the air for a moment a whorl of glittering green. There must have been several hundreds of them, and they screamed at the elephants and at us as they flew off, only to settle on another tree farther along our route, whence, as we came up, they broke away again, flashing greener and screaming more angrily than ever.

I said that we moved north on our elephants, and the reason for that was not so much that the sub-inspector had got tic information of a tiger in that direction, as that on Monday—he declared—it is lucky to ride north. To tell the truth, which is more than the sub-inspector could really do, no more definite news about tigers had been forthcoming overnight. There were, on the other hand, rumours involving two tigers or more, of which one certainly appeared to have its beat to the south. Possibly, however, this was only a small bagh—or leopard,—and the

jungle in which it lived—if it did live there—was a very large jungle. Whereas the jungle to the north in which the sub-inspector felt sure that the very big bagh did live was a small one, easy to beat. It was this latter point rather than the sub-inspector's superstition about riding north on Monday that decided the Collector to try the north jungle, and we entered it in about three-quarters of an hour from the time we started, the elephants having moved well. I find it easier to praise an elephant after I have got off it than when I am on it, for the reason that when its pace is most superb and rapid then is the man mounted on it most uncomfortable. No doubt the thing is a matter of use and wont. A mahout looks fairly comfortable on his steed's neck. So does a Babu on a pad. But then a Bengali always does look comfortable. It is his nature to, except in the dock, when, if he is guilty and he thinks the judge may be aware of the fact, his toes begin to twiddle. *Malaise* of that sort is worth watching for—an Indian judge has told me. Our Babus looked very comfortable, in spite of their respective guns, which they had been ordered to hold butt downwards, being sloped in a dead-line for one another's heads.

It was a jungle consisting chiefly of scrub-oaks, and to me it somehow looked uncommonly small to be the abode of a tiger. It could not have been half a mile wide, and its length was a mile at most. We had just passed through a village to enter it, and I could see thin smoke indicating another village on the opposite side.

"Surely," I said to the Collector, "a tiger doesn't live as close to mankind as this?"

"Oh yes," he said. "I shot my first tiger in a very similar place."

"But didn't the villagers dislike having him there?" I asked.

The wood was lined with paths through which it was clear the natives passed to their work on either side, and it struck me as singularly unpleasant to know that when one was coming home tired after a day's work one might find a tiger barring one's way.

"They don't like him," said the Collector, "any more than your villagers like a motor going through. But they get used to him. I shouldn't wonder at all if there was one here."

The elephants had separated a bit, and were beating the wood in line, swishing at the thicker cover with their trunks, and wheeling in and out.

The first thing that started up—with an awful clatter—was a pig, and he bolted before us at a great pace. Both Babus pointed their guns at the grey streak of him as he vanished, and the Collector was only just in time to prevent the sub-inspector from firing without taking aim—"We don't want to frighten the tiger away for the sake of a pig," he said.

"No, sir," said the sub-inspector, in quick sympathy with his chief, and hastened to tell the Babus that they were not to shoot at pigs. "Shoot only at tigers," he added.

"And if you shoot," said the Collector drily, "do not—as the sub-inspector does—first place the butt of your gun against the pit of your stomach and shut your eyes."

"I shall keep them open next time, your Honour," said the sub-inspector, as though he had hitherto been experimenting with a view to finding out what method of discharge was most to his superior's taste; and we moved on again in silence, only the mahouts giving an occasional sharp injunction to their elephants in that mahout language which they say is the same all over India and Ceylon.

Just as in otter-hunting the hound-work is to

many the most interesting part, so in this jungle-beating, elephant-work is. The huge creatures go so delicately and thoroughly. Some say that for all their horny skin they can feel the scratch of a dog-rose, with which the jungle is often thick, and I can believe it, from seeing their unwillingness to enter a dense patch. Yet they are more earnest than any human beater, and a good deal more competent, too, by reason of their long strong trunks, when anything has to be had out of close-growing clumps. It is not easy, of course, to tell precisely which of the work is done by the mahout and which by the elephant; but if there is any shirking, I should be inclined to ascribe it to the mahout for choice.

We put up nothing else in our first beat across the jungle except two jackals, that went off at a gentle canter, with their ears up, and a few mongooses; and coming back, higher up, we had no more success. We did indeed find the skeleton of a cow, but this was old, possibly two months or more. The sub-inspector advised that we should move on to a grass jungle hard by the river that separates Bengal from Nepal, where he now felt persuaded a bagh would be found. If it were not, he said, it would be simple to cross

the river, and beat for a while on the Nepal side. As, however, the entrance of Indian officials into that territory is strictly forbidden by treaty, the Collector refused to consider it, thereby showing himself less corruptible than the sub-inspector had supposed. He confessed to me that he was sorely tempted, and it must be a considerable temptation to enter at times and commit a dacoity upon wild beasts. Indigo-planters, who used to go in pretty freely fifteen or twenty years ago, before the authorities became too strict, have told me that the shooting was magnificent. The Nepalese villagers liked them to come and kill off a tiger free of charge, and if an official discovered them, it was sufficient to say that they had missed their way, and to move on to some other camping-ground equally rich in game. In all probability the game, both big and small, has increased since then. Nepal has not been civilised, and in a country where only a few years ago it was not uncommon—as again planters have told me—to see a man smeared with honey and tied up to a pole for the ants to eat —by way of punishment for some misdemeanour, —it is not likely that brutes, wild or otherwise, have been much reduced.

It was decided by the Collector that, instead of defying the laws of the country, we should beat once more through the little oak-jungle, and turn south later on, if it failed to produce anything. We were encouraged as we re-entered by meeting a villager, draped in faded pink, who told us that an old man in the far village had, only the evening before, seen "the jackal" as he returned from cutting grass in the jungle. The jackal had passed the old man not ten paces off, and the latter had flung himself on his face in fear. The villager called it "the jackal" all the time he spoke, but the Collector and the sub-inspector and the Babus, and in fact everyone but myself, seemed quite to understand that he thereby meant the tiger. It seems that is a custom. You do not in these sequestered places talk of a tiger at all, because if you do you may attract its attention to yourself. Woods as well as walls have ears. Any name—jackal, dog, creature—is to be preferred, and is used, as I have said, not slightingly but, on the contrary, out of respect. For the tiger is not supposed to know that the person who spoke of a jackal and desired its destruction in reality meant the royal beast. I suppose we had not left this duly cautious villager

for more than five minutes, and were beating a part of the jungle which we had already passed quite close to on our first beat, when the Collector, who was looking out on the left, suddenly sat up and fired twice in a twinkling.

"Tiger!" he said, and I said something very different, for I knew I had missed my first chance. I hadn't even seen the beast, and the Collector said afterwards that it had been worth seeing, as it had crossed full in sight of him slowly from one patch of cover to another. But there was no time to feel properly disgusted, and there might be another chance. Not a sound had greeted the bullets, and the mahout, who had put our elephant to a canter (if that is the word), declared the tiger had slipped off unwounded. His Honour had missed. He was still saying so — to the noise of crackling twigs and plunging feet—and we were all on the stretch of excitement, and Heaven only knows which way the Babus were pointing their guns, when suddenly we came on the tiger. There it lay on its right side—straight ahead of us — breathing stertorously, and we pulled up an elephant's length away amid great gabble from the mahouts and the Babus and the sub-inspector. Where was it hit? Was it

shamming? The Babus were for giving it a broadside. The sub-inspector desired target-practice from a distance. Only the chuprassie —a small and faithful soul—wished to get down and kick it. His Sahib had shot it. Therefore it must be dead, or very badly wounded. If by any chance it turned upon him, his Sahib would give it one more bullet. The skin must not be spoilt. The Collector chose that the chuprassie should not risk being spoilt either, and the eager little man was hauled up by the sub-inspector just as he was slinging himself down by the elephant's tail. At that moment the tiger gave a choke and half-rose, but sank again; and at the sub-inspector's very earnest request the Collector put another bullet in its head. So a little later the great cat died, having killed and eaten many cattle in its time; and stretched out, lithe and massive, and suggesting even in its death its strong and incomparable vitality, it evoked my sentiment. There seemed a strange waste in the destruction of a creature so full of life and beauty. One can rejoice in the death of a crocodile or a shark—such things are repulsive to man. The cat tribe is not. Between us there is not the same cold-blooded element. The heat and fierce-

ness of the tiger's is not so different from our own. I suppose St Francis could have said "Brother Shark," but a mere ordinary sinner could almost say "Brother Tiger."

Well, we sometimes go for our brothers heartily enough, and I have to confess that my humane sentiment did not amount to much, and was succeeded by that previous and much less humane feeling that I might with luck have shot it myself and hadn't. "I do think," I said reproachfully to the Collector, "that you need not have finished my first tiger with your first shot."

He also is a humane man, but he only grinned.

"Sorry," he said. "I wish you'd got it, of course. It's just as well it was dropped, though. A wounded tiger's a nuisance, especially when it comes roaring for your elephant."

"I daresay," I said grudgingly, for some experiences are worth having, and this would have been one.

Our elephant had been taken up to the tiger's body, and its waggling trunk, as it snuffed it from head to tail, proclaimed that the chuprassie might with safety descend. Already, as if by magic, the little wood was filled at a respectful distance with villagers, and as the chuprassie

took his proud stance by the body, they crowded up jabbering till the glade was like a parrot-house. The bolder spirits smacked their dead enemy, or dipped a finger in his blood, and the chuprassie watched with jealous eyes lest any one should try and steal a hair of its whiskers. These and the claws are so highly esteemed for charms that there is scarcely a Bengali who can refrain from abstracting them if he gets the chance. In this instance the whiskers were solemnly counted. I forget what they numbered, but I could see the chuprassie going over them again at intervals until the bullock-cart, which in some mysterious way was hauled up through the trees, arrived to take the body into camp to be skinned. The procession thereupon formed was a triumphant one, and must have numbered some hundreds, some on foot, some on the small ponies of the country. I particularly remember one aged man, in a bright mauve robe on a white pony, who hastily galloped up for the purpose of spitting at the dead tiger and saying, "Ho, ho, you thought you were a great tiger that could frighten us. But you are nothing but a weak little jackal—how could you kill a cow?"

This was a figure of speech, of course, for it

measured exactly eight foot eleven in length—medium for a tiger. Certainly it was not the eight-foot-high creature, bigger than a horse, which the sub-inspector had promised us. That one, he now vowed, was still at large, and would make even better hunting for his Honour, if his Honour would only wait and go after it. Unfortunately our time was limited. These are not days when the official can take a week off as he pleases for the hunting of tiger, and we had to move on that same afternoon. But the Collector said that he would return some day to that part of his district, and that meantime the sub-inspector had better keep a record of the tiger's movements, and also of the movements of dacoits, some of whom it would be well for him to catch.

About a month later, when we were back in the station, a young police superintendent—a Scotsman—came round to the bungalow. He too had been visiting the same outpost in the course of his duties two days before—that is to say, rather more than three weeks after the tiger was shot. As soon, he said, as he rode up, the sub-inspector had come bustling out with smiles upon his face, and in answer to the question what report he had to make, had said delightedly—

"Sir, I have to report that the Collector has shot a tiger."

"And what did he say about the dacoits?" demanded that official, unable to forget his duties as easily as the sub-inspector.

"Well, he's looking for them. But he's so pleased about the tiger still, and thinks you are, that they've rather taken a second place."

"I'll make him think," said the Collector grimly, and the young policeman winked at me.

"Shows how jolly incorruptible we have to be out here," he said. "The price of Empire . . . what?"

CHAPTER V.

OUP-OPP SAHIB.

IN Bengal the plains are so vast and so monotonous that you may ride straight ahead for a week, as we had done, and still, for all that the country has changed, fancy yourself to be in the place that you started from. On either side still stretches the illimitable grey ploughed land, marked off with the low grey ridges that are the only boundary marks. And the same tiny cattle stand about in the same hot glare. Or else it is an unploughed scene, and the jungle grass grows stiff and high, shutting off the runs of pig and leopard, and those tarns and lost watercourses that are thronged with wild-fowl of every sort, from the humble dhobie bird to the bulky, magnificent pelican.

'We had kept for the most part to the great road that runs north to the hills. Through all our long ride it, too, had preserved its unchanging character.

I wondered what the Tommies used to think of it in the days they marched that way—hundreds and hundreds of miles through the dust that is inches deep on the sides of the road, and thickly powdered to the tops of the trees that aisle it. The road is always at the same level, a few feet above the rest of the plains, so that it may not be flooded in the rains. Were the Tommies fascinated by the endless, hazy, golden sameness? Or did the sand in their boots and in their throats and the eternal heat that beats down through the trees and gets trapped in the shade monopolise their attention and their curses? They go by train now, and the road is left to the natives on foot or on little shambling tats or in bullock-carts that seem mere pillars of cloud, so much dust do the patient beasts kick up, or on camels that are driven down from the dry north to be sold to Mahometan dwellers on the plains, to be sacrificed at one of their festivals. Poor camels, they make but thin offerings when they come to the end of their journey.

The road had also been left to us—that is to say, the Collector and myself,—and I had seen many things of interest upon it, including a day-old elephant that a zemindar in one of the villages

called us in to look at, if it so pleased us. The zemindar himself was a thin, splendid old man, a Mahometan, with the mien and manner of a Hebrew patriarch, but he was famed chiefly for his dacoities and his oppression of the poor. He looked supremely beneficent as he showed off his absurd embryo of a mammoth, staggering against its mother's legs and staring painfully, with large blue eyes, at the crowd that squatted to admire it. It seemed to think Bengal a curious place, and it is. It was on the following day that we came in the afternoon to the rising ground. We saw it before us quite suddenly, on our left—land that climbed; and it gave us quite a thrill.

"By Jove, do you see that?" said the Collector.

"I do," I said, "it's a hill," and had to soothe my mare, who was as excited as I. If horses have fancies, I think she was feeling herself like Alice after she had got through the looking-glass. That is the way I felt when we rode on for a mile and the hill on our left did not vanish, but continued—not growing much higher, it is true, but maintaining its slope and revealing upon its side patches of dog-rose that grew thicker and thicker till they closed into a tree-jungle. Presently a side-track appeared, also on the left and rising, and

the Collector said: "I shouldn't be surprised if the dak bungalow were up there somewhere. Let's see."

We turned our horses into it, and they, tickled by the resistance so strangely presented to their feet, broke into a gallop and took us in less than a minute to the top. There, sure enough, was a dak bungalow, and a view as fine as from a mountain. For the hill—it was only a great sand-hill clothed at the back with jungle—in front gave sheer on to the great valley of the Naharuhda,—a sacred river, which, like so many Bengal rivers, is ever pouring the sand before it as it goes, so that even while it digs its channel it is silting it up, and wastes itself in crystal shallows, and bends to the least obstruction.

Up on the hill a little wind was blowing, so that one might almost have fancied oneself on some sea-cliff at home, overlooking the sand at the low tide. The illusion was dispelled by the appearance of a sub-inspector of police, of whom the Collector proceeded to make inquiries, official and otherwise. He was one of the sub-inspectors who, in contrast to the previous one, believe in knowing very little, and keeping that to himself. I do not know what he said about dacoities, but I do

know that the closest cross-examination could not extract from him either that there were any chickens to be had for our dinner or that he knew anything about shikar in the neighbourhood.

"But there must be some," said the Collector. "Think. Are there not duck or teal?"

We could quite plainly from the hill behold two brahminy ducks, floating fat and yellow on the limpid stream. Not that brahminy ducks count.

"I do not think it, your Honour," said the sub-inspector.

"And no bagh—panther or tiger?"

"I do not think it, your Honour."

"Does nobody go shooting in the neighbourhood,—none of the Babus?"

"I do not think it, your Honour."

But the last denial was too much for the feelings of the dak bungalow attendant, who had hovered inquisitively into our presence.

"May it please your Honour," he said to the Collector, but with a deprecating glance towards the sub-inspector, "there is without doubt shikar in the jungle."

The Collector's face brightened.

"Also," said the dak man quickly, seeing that

he was making a good impression, "there is one who knows much shikar, and lives not far away."

"Who is that?"

"Ou-opp Sahib."

"Ou-opp Sahib," repeated the Collector; "a Sahib of the name of Ou-opp?"

"Yes, your Honour," broke in the sub-inspector, "Tibi Ou-opp Sahib. He shoot many panther."

If you are a Bengali, and you find that your own statements and attitude are not winning so much approval as the statement and attitude of some other person, you do not waste time and possibly the favour of a superior by being rigidly consistent. On the contrary, you at once adopt the other person's *rôle*, thereby recommending yourself and taking the wind out of the other person's sails. The Collector dislikes this habit. "Who is Tibi Ou-opp Sahib?" he therefore asked of the khitmatghar.

"Your Honour," began the sub-inspector, "he is a young man."

"I asked the khitmatghar," said the Collector. "Bear in mind, sub-inspector, that you know nothing whatever about shikar. You have just said so. Let the khitmatghar speak."

The khitmatghar, much gratified, began—

"Your Honour, Tibi Ou-opp he is a young man. He shoot many panther."

"And he lives near here, does he?" said the Collector.

"He live in the village," said the khitmatghar earnestly. "He shoot many panther."

"And you're quite sure Tibi Ou-opp is a Sahib?"

The khitmatghar was a little shaken by having to stick to one statement so often, but he stuck to it nevertheless.

"He is a young man," he said, "Tibi Ou-opp Sahib. He shoot many panther."

"Well, then," said the Collector, "perhaps you will send a message to 'Ou-opp Sahib, and ask if he will come round to the bungalow and tell us about panthers."

"Yes, your Honour," said the khitmatghar.

"And I get chicken for your Honour," said the sub-inspector.

"There aren't any chickens to be got," said the Collector. "Still, they may as well be here in good time for dinner."

The sub-inspector saluted, and went off some-

what crest-fallen to find that his negative attitude towards things in general had not been the success he hoped for, and probably meditating vengeance on the khitmatghar.

"You never know with some of these men," said the Collector, as we entered the bungalow, "what the truth is. The sub-inspector, who is remarkably stupid about his actual duties, may really know nothing about shikar. On the other hand, he may know a lot, and not want to tell us."

"Why?" I asked.

"Difficult to say. He may think that if we hear of panthers we shall stay a day longer, and find out something against him. Some villagers might turn up with a petition, or some zemindar who has quarrelled with him may accuse him of extorting bribes. Anyhow, Ou-opp Sahib sounds more promising, though why Sahib I can't think. Sahib always means a white man, and there can't be any white man living here now. Funnily enough there were British cantonments here fifty years ago, but I don't suppose that, except for a civilian once in two years for a night, there has been a European near the place since then. Besides, Tibi?"

"It's not a particularly Christian name, certainly," I agreed.

"They've muddled it somehow, depend upon it," said the Collector, and we had to leave it at that until we should see Ou-opp Sahib.

As a matter of fact, the chickens came first. I do not know where they came from, but one of them flew in as if from the jungle with at least twelve villagers and the khitmatghar in pursuit. It was corralled in the verandah of the bungalow, and I think I got it for dinner. It must have had a fine cross-country run. It was after dinner that a note was brought in from the village by a small brown boy in a yellow garment. The Collector read it aloud—

"I have the one-ar inform you that

"SER

"Pleas let me know the you wish to go out for Shooting to morrow or nat. if you wish to go then what time.

"I get a Khubhur for a panther Cloce near cross the re-ve-ar weast side, I hope the you get it to morrow

"Your most Obduntly

"T. B. WEBB."

"T. B. Webb," repeated the Collector,—"so he is a white man after all. At least, he may be. Some of the letter sounds British," he grunted. "I wonder what kind."

The Collector grunted again, and I understood the shyness that Anglo-Indians have for white men who have disappeared from among their kind in India. They are not much sought after, for in their persons they have, as it were, betrayed the West to the East. Probably the causes of such disappearances are sordid enough—just such causes as drive a man downhill in his own country. Out here the hill seems steeper, and the fall into a more bottomless abyss. And those who go down to it must surrender not only ambition and friends and self-respect, but hope itself—the hope of ever mixing again with his own people or seeing the faces that understand or sharing the memories which are all their former life.

"Of course he can't be very down on his luck or he would not show up at all," said the Collector, and wrote off a note to T. B. Webb Sahib naming eight o'clock for the starting time next morning.

Punctually at that hour Ou-opp Sahib presented himself before the bungalow, and as though resolved to elude all ordinary formulas turned out

to be an entirely brown young man. At least, his colour was brown, and he had the small features of a slim Bengali. In dress, on the other hand, he was English. He wore a solar topi, knicker-bockers, puttees, and a white jacket. Indeed, all his things had once been white, but that was some time before, and the dhobie had not seen them for many weeks. I glanced at his face again to make sure that disacquaintance with the sacred waters of the Naharuhda might not account for its brownness too. But it was not so. His colour was Indian born, and he had the eyes of a Bengali, which are somehow strange. Only, behind it all—or mixed up with it all—there was a jaunty, disdainful, damn-the-consequences appearance that was not native. Now a Bengali is often jaunty, and to his inferiors he is invariably disdainful. But in his freest and easiest and most contemptuous mood he is very, very careful about the consequences if they are in any way likely to affect himself. Consequences were clearly nothing to this young man. He saluted slightly, and in reply to the Collector's inquiries showed himself truly laconic.

"Ah," said the Collector, "you're the Mr Webb who sent me the letter last night."

"Yes, sir."

"I suppose you've done a good deal of shikar round here? What sort?"

"All sort," said Ou-opp Sahib.

"Including panthers," said the Collector.

"Yes," said Ou-opp Sahib. He had not waved his hand, but he gave me the impression of having waved his hand as though to signify that panthers were of very small account indeed.

"Tigers too?" asked the Collector.

"I have shooted the tigers. No tigers here now."

There was nothing boastful in his speech, even though it suggested that Ou-opp Sahib had rid the district of tigers; and, as though to emphasise the difference between his British curtness and the full flow of the true Bengali, a fat middle-aged man, who had apparently accompanied him up from the village, and who turned out to be the schoolmaster, inserted himself at this point into the conversation.

"Oh yes, your Honour, Ou-opp Sahib have shoot many tigers. He shoot the tiger on foot. He have in his house the skin of the tiger. He shoot also many panther. He have the skin of many panther."

I never ascertained precisely what the schoolmaster's hours and duties were in Bengal; but I

noticed that if an opportunity ever presented itself of enlarging his mind by contemplating a Sahib, or exchanging views with him, or assisting him in a hunt, he is always ready to quit his desk and follow the gleam. The scholars, perhaps, do home-work. It is not a bad plan, and the schoolmaster improves his English—which is apt to be more grammatical than idiomatic. Moreover, it is not inconsistent with a general assiduity and love of school-work which some English schoolmasters might well envy.

Ou-opp Sahib looked rather bored by the schoolmaster's eulogies, just as an Englishman might have done; and it was only when the Collector began a discussion of what jungle we were to try that he showed any interest.

"I think the jungle to the weast," he said. "I think a panther there."

"All right; I leave it to you," said the Collector.

"You have the elephants?"

"Two," said the Collector. "You will go on our second elephant with my chuprassie? You've brought a gun?"

"Yes," said Ou-opp Sahib, and called to the small boy who had brought the note the evening before. With much pride the boy handed to him

a muzzle-loading gun, and with much nonchalance Ou-opp received it.

"The elephants are ready?" he inquired.

The Collector supposed they were. For about an hour they had been having their morning baths in the Naharuhda, lying flat while their mahouts climbed about them with buckets and swabbed their upper hides. Afterwards they had retired, all black and shiny, to the shade of a peepul-tree and begun the breakfast of green tree-tops which they had brought in for themselves. But it seemed there was to be a hitch. One of the mahouts was in waiting to say that his elephant had strained herself, and would be unable to go hunting.

"I don't believe it," said the Collector, and we all went over to where the elephants stood. "Now let's see this strain," he went on,—"off fore leg is it? Let's see it walking."

The mahout salaamed and called to the great creature to lift him up. Then he made it walk towards us. On it came, walking on three legs, with the third held up pathetically like a hurt dog's. Also it rolled its trunk as a man rolls his eyes in anguish. There seemed to me no doubt that it was badly strained.

But Ou-opp Sahib had drawn the Collector aside and was whispering to him, and after a moment the Collector said—"Let the mahout get down."

The mahout got down somewhat unwillingly.

"Now let the mahout call to the elephant to come towards us."

A little crowd had collected from nowhere in particular, as it always does in India if there is anything of interest to be seen, and with genial faces waited for the experiment. The mahout called in the elephant language, and calmly and steadily, without the least sign of lameness, the elephant walked towards us. Judging from the native faces, one might have supposed that a somewhat commonplace miracle had taken place. But judging from the Collector's voice as he spoke a few warm words to the mahout, one realised that a somewhat ordinary trick had been tried on. It is not always easy to detect them. In this case the mahout had no doubt for some private reason wanted a day off, and by some simple pressure of the hand or foot had induced the elephant to walk lame. Elephants can be taught almost anything, and pitted against the combined forces of them and their mahouts a sahib is sometimes helpless. Luckily, once he had been outbluffed the mahout

had not the fortitude to try any more tricks, and the elephants were pronounced ready in a very short space of time.

It was "weast" where the "Khubhur" had been got that Ou-opp guided us, into the dense jungle that spread from the back of the bungalow first of all, because that was on the way to the river, and we might, Ou-opp said, strike panthers there also. Very soon, as the elephants stepped up and down its hilly parts, I found myself clutching at the ropes convulsively, for the back of a climbing or descending elephant is no better than a shute. Not the most comfortable of shutes either. But the jungle itself made amends for the trials of riding through it. It was a tangle of cotton-trees, blazing their scarlet flowers from leafless boughs, acacias swinging brown seed-pods a foot long, dark peepuls and scrub oak, girt about with dog-rose and wild plum. Through this intricacy Ou-opp steered the elephants as a captain his ship, pausing at various spots as if they were ports of call for the picking up of panthers. I was too interested in his woodcraft to mind that no panthers as a matter of fact showed themselves at these points, but the Collector did not wholly approve.

"It's all very well," he said; "they're just the

sort of places you would find panthers in, but they're not going to wait for us to come up. And they can hide themselves anywhere in this thickness. What's he up to now?"

Ou-opp's elephant, which was a little ahead of us, had been halted in a sort of little opening in the undergrowth, and Ou-opp pointed a slim hand as we came up.

"Panther bring calf here," he said briefly.

"Bones of a calf, are they?" said the Collector, peering down.

"How old do you say?"

"Two week," said Ou-opp.

"He won't be lying about here, then."

Ou-opp shook his head.

"Soon we find fresh bone," he said, and led us forward. Sure enough, in quite a few minutes we came on much fresher remains, including still recognisable portions of a pariah dog, which, however, Ou-opp disdained to linger over, on the ground that they were a week old. He almost gave the impression of having seen the luckless dog brought there on the day of its demise: yet the jungle must have been inaccessible except to elephants. Indeed from this time on we had to get them to clear the way for us, by tearing off with their

trunks such boughs as threatened to sweep us from the pads, and only Ou-opp's calm certainty prevailed on the Collector to remain patient. He hated a thick jungle, reasonably enough, for it gives the leopard every chance of sneaking off unseen when you are just on top of him. Still, he let Ou-opp go ahead, and we came on more remains—calf again this time, and possibly fresher. I don't know why I say possibly, for Ou-opp said they were not more than four days; and when the chuprassie, who also boasts himself at shikar, differed from him, Ou-opp carelessly supported his own view by pointing to a tree close by which was all scored with leopards' claws, and saying—

"Panther scratch him four nights off."

The chuprassie gave in before so much detailed woodlore.

A little later, after we had just crossed a dry tangled gully in Ou-opp's wake, we came up to find that he had descended from his elephant, and was making a reconnaissance on foot. The chuprassie murmured to us that they had just come on fresh leavings, and that there was a sort of hole in the bank hard by.

"But where is Ou-opp Sahib?" demanded the Collector.

"He look in, your Honour, to see if panther is there," said the chuprassie; and following the direction of his finger, we perceived in among the undergrowth, with his gun held carelessly in one hand, Ou-opp down on his knees peering into a hole in the bank.

"Here, I say," began the Collector in tones of remonstrance, "supposing there is a leopard inside."

Ou-opp had already got quietly to his feet again. "Otter," he said, and slung himself up the tail of the elephant. I thought to myself that it would take a good deal to persuade me to go on all fours in front of a leopard's possible lair and decide it was only an otter's.

Another quarter of an hour's thorny going, such as the elephants hate, brought us out of the wooded area on to the edge of the river. Crossing it, we got at once into a great grass waste, and the Collector was about to stop Ou-opp and ask him what his plan of campaign now was, when Ou-opp himself called a halt. His own elephant was at the time close to what might be described as a dense tussock of grass, some ten feet high and the same in diameter, and as ours came up Ou-opp held up his hand warningly.

"What is it?" asked the Collector, expecting, as he told me, to see a pig break away.

"Panther, sir," said Ou-opp, and pointed into the tussock. His gun lay carelessly across his knee and his legs swung idly down. It is not a position in which I have ever seen an English gamekeeper, but somehow a smart young English gamekeeper was what Ou-opp reminded me of at that moment. I fancy it was the respectful air of patronage with which he offered something irreproachable in the way of sport to the gentlemen amateurs before him. He as good as said, "It will amuse you, but I have seen so much of it"; and while I was being amused, and just beginning to wonder vaguely whether it was usual to shoot at leopards before you saw them, the Collector had let fly into the tussock, there was a snarling hiss, and something had bounded out on the side away from us and was leaving behind it a wake of shivering jungle-grass. After that we were in the thick of the chase. The mahouts had become yelling fiends, the elephants were going at a floundering gallop, the jungle was like a sea swept by a violent squall. Then, as I was wondering how much practice it required to be able to be in an upright position on the pad at the critical moment, we had all, so to

speak, pulled up on our haunches, and Ou-opp's mahout was pointing excitedly at a patch of grass. Ou-opp evidently had his eye on it, but his gun still lay across his lap idle. He did not lift it even when, a second later, the leopard, with another sudden snarl, leapt at his dangling legs. The elephant wheeled right round trumpeting.

"Look out," I said involuntarily, and Ou-opp smiled slightly.

"Panther leg broken," he said, and it was so. Owing to that fact it had missed its spring by inches and dropped back in the grass, a bunch of snarling, crouching yellow. Another bullet and it turned over on its side dead, and Ou-opp had dismounted to measure it.

We went on afterwards for two or three hours, but we got nothing else, and there was no particular reason why we should. Panthers do not herd together, and there is not much beating to be done with two elephants. Only I had the fanciful impression that Ou-opp was not interested in producing another bagh for us. His preserves, so to speak, had been shot over sufficiently for the day. Or else he had an engagement to keep. He courteously showed us more bones here and there, and many fascinating bits of the jungle. His wood-

craft was unexceptionable, but it did not result in any more panthers. And on the way back, which took us near the village, he requested to be put down, merely asking laconically, when the Collector acknowledged his services, if we would care for further sport on the morrow. On the morrow, unfortunately, we had to move fifteen miles farther, the Collector explained; whereat Ou-opp Sahib saluted and walked off, having told us no word about himself or his lineage.

We learnt a little about him that evening from one of the chuprassies, who had got it from the schoolmaster; and it appeared from this source that Tibi Ou-opp Sahib was son to yet another Tibi Ou-opp Sahib, who had settled in the village many many years before. What had this original Ou-opp Sahib been? Nothing less than an English Tommy. No wonder that our Tibi had jaunty legs and a devil-may-care bearing that was not of Bengal. The elder Ou-opp had come out for the Mutiny, and had taken part in some of the later operations against hill tribes, for which services Government or a Maharajah had rewarded him with a grant of land in the hill country. Presumably he was not a man of the hills—not of such hills as the Himalayas, at least,—and he had sold his hill estate

and drifted down to this village, where there was a hill indeed, but a hill that only served to make the plains more conspicuous. Here, too, the British cantonments had once been, and here no doubt he had once camped among his own people. I expect that was the call. The regiments had been marched away long since, but he would know where the tents had been and the drill-ground and the Colonel's bungalow and the canteen and the cells; for him in this sweltering Indian village there would be echoes of the bugles and of the songs that he had sung with his mates. The East—one is told—never changes, but that is true only of the spirit of the East. The landscape changes amazingly fast, especially up country. There, once again, a river will change its course, and leave leagues of country high and dry, making endless marshes of ploughed land, and itself reappearing, a day's march off, as smooth and as limpid in some new channel. Always, too, the jungle-grass keeps rolling up like a tide, removing landmarks.

We looked for signs of the old cantonments and found none. But Ou-opp Senior had known where to look, and, war-worn and changed into an Indian landowner, he had settled down—that English soldier—in the place which (one may

guess) he had come to first as a raw recruit, full of England and fresh as the six months' voyage of those days would leave him from poaching the Squire's rabbits. Now he was a Squire himself, but in a far country, where jackals howl all night and the only keepers that try to stop a man's sport are the great beasts themselves that keep the jungle. And since Squires have land to leave and must have heirs to leave it to, Ou-opp married some brown girl of the village. I choose to think that he knew her before he went off to fight—met her at the village-well when he was off duty and sick for the Pollies and Letties he had left behind him. He liked her soft eyes and the poise of her as she held the pitcher on her head, and he helped her to draw up the water, and told her in his alien tongue the things that every woman understands. And she, I expect, was taken by the jauntiness of his legs and the devil in his eyes, and waited for him to come back gladly.

All that is certain is that he did come back and marry, and that the result was the Tibi Ou-opp of our acquaintance. Thomas Bertram? Timothy Benjamin? His father must have known, but I doubt if Tibi himself remembered or had

known himself to bear any name but Tibi Ouopp for many years. It was twenty, the schoolmaster said, since the old man died; and all that survived of him—besides Tibi—was the topi and the puttees and the jacket that Tibi wore, and the muzzle-loading gun which he carried so professionally.

Not much to leave? Perhaps not. He was an English soldier, and might have gone home and married an English girl, and left white sons to strengthen our army and help to govern the world. Perhaps before the end he himself may have thought that he had lost too much and was leaving too little, and leaving that to a strange people. Nobody can say. He would not have told that to the Bengali schoolmaster. He could not have told it to Tibi, his son. And even if he thought it, it does not follow that the thought corresponded with the reality. If the legacy he bequeathed was indeed to the East and not to the West, yet in its way it was an English legacy—this son, who, for all his brownness, was the only sportsman to be found in fifty square miles of country.

CHAPTER VI.

FROM A BENGAL VERANDAH.

It was pleasant, after ten days in the jungle, to sit on the verandah of the bungalow and enjoy the cooler and less strenuous life that was to be lived from one of these long chairs that Anglo-Indians have discovered to be most suited to the human shape during the hot hours of the day. It was a life of observation mainly—observation of things that went on about the garden and the house, varied occasionally by a little bargaining when a box-wallah came along and noted in the eyes of new-comers curiosity to see his goods and great chances of selling them at inordinate prices. The box-wallah is, of course, our pedlar glorified, or at least reverted to the middle ages when a pedlar was a pedlar. The box-wallah always had an assistant who carried on his head the box-wallah's stock-in-trade, and after one

had told the box-wallah one did not want anything, the box-wallah's assistant would put down the bundle, and the box-wallah himself would begin to untie it, announcing—

"I sell you Darjilling carpet, very nice silk, Bokhara work, silver, turquoise, green jade."

"Nothing to-day, thank you," we would say courteously, and the box-wallah would reply—

"Ver well. I sell you only for luck. You not pay me much, just for luck. I give you ver cheap. Mem Sahib see, beautiful silk for dress."

Out would come beautiful silk for dress—in many textures and colours—followed by rag carpets, each rag a gorgeous colour and the whole an amazing harmony of brightness, jade necklaces, wrought-silver salt cellars, cut and uncut gems, worthless and valuable side by side, Sari lengths and umbrellas richly embroidered for Rajahs, and fit for nobody else—a curious miscellany. You heedlessly single something out, and down squats the box-wallah, all smiles and self-sacrifice, prepared to haggle for the articles till sunset, prepared to make large profits if you are foolish, or to exchange at a fair price if you are patient and calm and mind the lapse of time as little

as he. What an ancient art is bargaining, and how the modern Westerner hates it. I never quite understand why. You will hear English ladies who at home will spend days examining sale-priced articles at big stores, declare that they hate Oriental bargaining. It takes so long, and it's so insulting to be asked five times what the man will accept. But what was time ever to a woman shopping, and as for the insult of the preliminary demand — that is a mere convention, an immemorial piece of ceremony, the "grande parade" of the salesman before swords are actually crossed. It is not to be denied that the custom in our own country, where we have made a fetish of time, would be an intolerable one. But here in the East where the sun stands still in the heavens, it seems suitable enough. The box-wallah goes at last, and one is at liberty to watch the birds in the garden for a while. There was always a hoopoe tripping and pecking over the tennis-lawn, when it was not being played on. First it would take a short run, then it would take a long peck; then a short peck and a long run. Every day it did the tennis-lawn most thoroughly on this plan, and I fancy did itself pretty thoroughly too. At a distance

it looks a gay dainty bird, perky and picturesque; but it is in fact a ragged and rather meagrely clothed bird, its plumage thin and dispersed, its habits unclean. It is one of those birds which, though flying well enough in their own style, seem to have less wingedness about them, less spirit of the air than most. Perhaps that is because one sees it so often on the ground; perhaps because its tuft is more noticeable than its wings. The glory of a bird is its wings, and the bird that has some other characteristic which draws the attention away from these always seems so much less of the air and more of the earth. So to my mind the peacock's tail and the plumage of the bird of Paradise and the bill of the hornbill and the webbed feet of the penguin almost turn these creatures out of the bird category. What have they to do with true birds — birds that skim the air like the swallow or steady the wind like a gull, or whizz and flash like a kingfisher, or hover down the darkness like a night-jar, or quiver into the sun like a lark? Certainly the hoopoe is a groundling, and so are those dull and dusty birds, called the seven brothers (sometimes called the seven sisters), which are always busy under the shrubs

at the end of the garden—at a sort of slow and very stupid game, rather like follow-my-leader might be if one had no leader and didn't go anywhere except in between two or three shrubs and back again, talking hard all the time about obviously trivial matters. I may be prejudiced, but I prefer to think of those birds as the seven sisters. Overhead, a roller, which is like our jay, but bigger, and has more tints of blue on its back than all the painters have thought of since the beginning of the world, would look on silently from the shade of a peepul, as it were astounded at such aimless energy; while from the top of some other tree a coppersmith, monotonously and ventriloquistically, said "tonk, tonk!" That is why it is called the coppersmith. It always sits at the top of a tree, but you never can find out which tree, however much you look, for as I have said the bird is a ventriloquist and its song seems to come from the top of every tree in turn. This cunning of the coppersmith is well-advised, for though its sound is not unpleasant it becomes in the end so wearisome, especially in the hot weather, that people would gladly slay the bird if they knew where to find him. Here, by the way, is an example

which should go to qualify the statement that there is no bird-music in India. It is true that there is no such variety of music as we get in an English garden, but there are nevertheless a score of sweet noises to be heard all over Bengal, starting with the coppersmith. In England, where the noise of the anvil and church bells are thought quaint and pleasing, he would be highly esteemed; and so would the doves which coo just like our own, and that other bird which has the blackbird's voice, though with fewer notes to it. There may be in Bengal some birds with positively unpleasant voices—such as the peacock and the brain-fever bird, but they are odious mostly because no noise is alluring when the thermometer stands too high. Men, particularly white men, are critical of all music in hot weather, and the noise of a rookery which delights the ears of men at home would drive the same men distracted in Bengal.

Also on the lawn, from which, and from the hoopoe, I seem to have wandered, you would see any day a couple of mali boys, watering it. It took Clothilde a week to find out how many mali boys there were, and then I think she made out that there were six, not including the old

head gardener. For a garden which all told could not have been much more than an acre, and would have been managed in England by a single man easily, this staff seemed considerable; but judged by results it was totally inadequate. The old man himself kept entirely to a small strip of vegetable garden, and so dug and watered it at the wrong time of day that nothing survived to maturity in it at all, and the only things I remember to have eaten from it while we were there were some potatoes the size of green peas. Four of the six boys were employed in obscure ways, and were not so much in evidence as the two boys who watered the tennis-lawn. They were always to be seen, the one pumping the bucket full and the other emptying it upon the brown grass. They were very steady boys at this sort of work — too steady indeed, for though strictly enjoined not to water during the full heat of the day, they invariably did so if they thought that no eye was upon them. One of these boys was just like a little black gnome, and the other was a light-brown shapely youth who walked with the strut of a pigeon and was a considerable dandy so far as two garments would let him be.

One was a yellow garment and the other white, and they were interchangeable to an extent undreamt of in our philosophy of clothes. In the morning, for example, the yellow garment would be a turban, gracefully wrapped about his head, while the white one was a skirt: in the afternoon the white one would be a sort of waistcoat to set off his yellow headgear now acting as trousers. And there was a still further variety of uses for them on other occasions, as when he was ordered off to be a ball boy under one of the chuprassies.

What a servant may and may not do is, of course, even more strictly defined in India than in England; nevertheless they can be got to do things seemingly inconsistent with their office at times—and the chuprassies, even more than the mali boys, were a case in point. The idea of a chuprassie is that he should be a Government messenger. A Bengal Collector is allowed, officially, seven chuprassies, or six chuprassies and a bicycle. At first hearing this sounds as if Government put but a light value upon human labour. One can conceive that if Bengal had its Labour party, members of it would not be long in getting up to say "This scandalous

method of estimating the value of the working man as no greater than that of a velocipede is only another example of the contempt in which an effete oligarchy holds the People"; but Bengal has not its Labour party, and in any case the Collector's predecessor had chosen the six and the bicycle in preference to seven chuprassies. The Collector himself on one occasion raised in me the suspicion that if he could have had six bicycles and one chuprassie, he would have been even better pleased, not because the bicycles would have been particularly useful, but because they would at least have been harmless. Bicycles, said the Collector, could not get into trouble, and chuprassies could and did. I think he was arguing from some particular case, and he had to admit that the statement about the bicycle was not entirely true. As a matter of fact, it was in trouble most of the time. The reason for that was that by some piece of red tape it had been ordered straight from England—a light and elegant free-wheel machine, such as in England would have been well worth its price. In a district where no roads were, and it had to be ridden over sandpits and stubble fields, it became expensive if only because its

tyres and other parts were in constant need of repairs. Had he been allowed to purchase an old solid-tyred machine on the spot, the previous Collector would have paid less money for it and would have got some work out of it. A solid-tyred machine could at least have been pushed about the country, and the chuprassie pushing it would have had an appearance of dignity which, false as it might have been, would have reflected glory upon his employer, the British Raj. As it was, the pnuematic-tyred machine, as soon as its tyres had punctured, was difficult even to shove, and lent little or no dignity to the shover.

In spite then of this aid to speed, it is clear that in a district nearly as big as Wales six men could be pretty easily employed in bearing messages between the centre and the circumference. Still there were intervals in which the chuprassies had very little to do, and it was then that one had to find employment for them—of an unofficial sort—to keep them out of mischief. The Collector's six had been with him some time, and seemed to be suited according to their natural capacities. Thus Akbar, a magnificent old man with a grey beard, a Pathan, who had served in the army, and had tramped

East to find Government work on his retirement, had eventuated as a singularly efficient nurse under the ayah. He never seemed so happy as when pushing the children about the compound in the perambulator or watching their clockwork frog jumping upon the verandah. That frog, and also a mechanical duck that waddled, was a great delight to all the chuprassies, and I often saw them when they were waiting for letters outside the Collector's door, which also opened on to the verandah, wheedle the children to fetch from the nursery, if only for a minute or two, one of these alluring creatures. Then they would all squat on their heels together, children and chuprassies alike, while the frog hopped or the duck waddled, until a sharp ring brought the men bustling to their feet to go off into the sun with a Government message.

Akbar, tall and stately, being under-housemaid, it was fitting that a very tiny man with deep gimlety eyes and a small black beard hiding a monkey face should be the shikari among the chuprassies. I have mentioned his zeal in the matter of the tiger; and when we were in camp, he always made it his business to report the

trails of birds or beasts, to gather beaters if wanted, to mark birds that fell, and to go after them himself when fear of scratches deterred the faint hearts. He was not perhaps a very efficient organiser of casual followers, but he was dauntless in the extreme, and that and his keenness covered a multitude of minor sins. He was a local Hindoo, and so was Dhanpat, another of the chuprassies, whose courage however was not conspicuous. He did not indeed show any particular talent while we were there, unless you can call it a talent to get himself suspected of using his metal badge for purposes of exacting baksheesh from jungly and ignorant peasants. He looked intelligent enough for better things, and I remember that the Collector threatened him with dismissal unless he at least acquired the art of putting up tent-poles in such a way that the tents would not collapse. Under these circumstances Dhanpat gloomily acquired the art, but one never felt quite safe under the tents he had erected.

The other chuprassies are less distinct in my memory. There was a tall good-looking young man who was intensely stupid, like so many other good-looking young men. He often

acted as superintendent of ball boys at lawn tennis, letting the balls slip through his hands with an almost incredible facility, and directing the other boys to pursue after them and throw them back to him (when he generally missed them again) with an imperturbability that no shouts from the players impaired. The other two may have been more talented, but were less showy, and seemed to spend most of their spare time in oiling the bicycle. Each of these men received six rupees per month, which seems a comparatively small sum and does not explain the zeal with which the post of chuprassie is sought. There India comes in. A Government servant is a Government servant—not in our sense of thereby being the possessor of an easy and permanent post ending up with a pension — but as having become one invested with Government authority, which in the East may be turned to all sorts of mysterious purposes. Heaven knows how the thing works out so much to the Government servant's advantage. A messenger—even a Government messenger—would seem a humble enough person, but he is not so in Bengal. I have seen the chuprassies, when we were out in camp—camping as likely

as not in some public place—sitting like spiders in a web, waiting their chance to pounce on some person who was daring to try his ordinary short cut home which led him past the tents, and turning him back in spite of all protestations with a lordly insistence not to be disregarded. The love of power then which every Bengali has is one thing that a Government post ministers to, and probably the love of money is another. Just as some post-office officials, policemen, station-masters and others appear in some unknown way to use their position for the acquisition of a salary greatly in excess of that paid them by Government, so the chuprassies may gather in their tithes. Their methods can only be guessed. They may represent themselves as acquainted with the contents of the despatches they carry—contents which they are willing to reveal to interested parties if sufficient rupees are slipped into their hands. Or they may warn a similarly dishonest policemen that he is about to be inspected and detected, or extort presents in kind from a village on the ground that their master has demanded them. Always, living as they do, on the steps, so to speak, of the local throne of the District Magistrate, they

can profess to be in all manner of state secrets which they can reveal or conceal according to the way those hypothetically interested in such secrets treat them.

How can Government put down corruption on these lines? That is one of the big questions of India. If it could be answered in the chuprassie's case it could be answered also in the case of the other more important native officials. Some people are for paying all Government servants higher wages. But apart from the ordinary difficulty of raising the money, and the doubtful economics of raising the salaries of posts which in any case are eagerly sought after, there remains the fact that no increase of pay that could be contemplated would make some of these Government posts one quarter as valuable as they are at present when worked by an astute native in the native manner. Another way of decreasing corrupt practices which I have heard advocated is so to increase the staff of white officials in India that a real supervision of native subordinates could be practised, but that again is a scheme well-nigh impracticable by reason of the expense it would entail. There remains merely the hope that every little discouragement

of corruption slowly tells, and the knowledge that such discouragement is steadily applied.

From the verandah one would at intervals see most of the servants of the house. Clothilde said she had tried to count them, as well as the mali boys, but had given it up and asked the Collector's wife instead. She had been uncertain and had sent for the bearer, who estimated the present numbers at twenty-five, not counting a boy whom the cook had recently got in. Strangers to India are always puzzled by the quantity of servants that seem necessary to a household, and it takes some time to find that they all manage to get through some form of work, however light, during the course of the day. The occupations of many of them, such as the cook, the syces, the dhirzie, are obvious, and their names familiar even to people who have not visited India. I do not know that the Collector's household staff was in any way out of the common. The cook was a very good cook, and the dhirzie was a very pleasant old dhirzie. I do not know that any dhirzie would rank as very good, but this old man was at least pleasant and picturesque and could give an indubitable smile upon occasions, as when the

children brought him the pieces of a china doll which they had broken and asked him to sew them together. The old man sat on the verandah on a striped durry, all day and every day, and his shoes, with pointed curved-up toes, stood in the extreme corner of the lowest step of the verandah, where he stepped out of them every day when he arrived. He had a sewing-machine of his own, and a sewing-machine is a time-saving instrument, but he did not save any time with it. Something of his own immemorial calm and slowness he seemed to impart to it as he turned the handle, and I think he would have gone on sewing through an earthquake. One of the syces, just before we came back to the station, had given Clothilde a lesson in cleanliness which she could not get over. It appeared that getting out of bed one morning she caught sight of him some little way off in the compound squatted on the ground cleaning his teeth. She had her bath and dressed herself leisurely as one does in India. The whole business took her rather over an hour, and when she looked out again at the end of it, the syce was still squatted on the ground cleaning his teeth. The least desirable of the staff in our experience was the pani-wallah,

who committed two thefts during our visit, though the first was not brought home to him and originated in any case with a pariah dog. There were always mangy wolfish pariah dogs hanging about the compound — but not near enough as a rule to be shot; and this dog being of an enterprising nature sneaked on to the back verandah just after the children's dinner, and carried off a vegetable dish which had been left there, containing a silver fork. Clothilde saw it making off with the whole dish in its mouth, and the pani-wallah saw it too and gave chase. The pani-wallah came back with the dish, but declared that the pie dog had got away with the vegetables and the silver fork. He thought the dog must have swallowed the fork, and since further searches did not reveal it, his story had to be accepted, though the bearer, who always felt responsible for anything that went amiss in the house, seemed very sceptical. The very next day the pani-wallah stole Clothilde's rings. She left them on the wash-stand just as she was starting for a drive, remembered them five minutes later, and turned back to get them. They were gone. The Collector's wife summoned Bonamalee, and he, knowing that memsahibs were in the habit

of mislaying things, and still as convinced as on the day he met us in Calcutta that Clothilde was incapable of looking after herself or anything else, insisted that she must have put the rings somewhere else and forgotten about them. Clothilde stuck to the wash-stand being the place where she had left them; whereupon Bonamalee asked who did she suspect. Anybody might have gone into the bathroom and taken the rings. Clothilde said that she did not suspect anybody, but that fresh water had been placed in the basin during the last five minutes. The Collector's wife supported her by saying in a loud voice that if the rings were not forthcoming instantly, the police must be sent for. There were several servants within hearing, and their faces fell, for to have the police in the house is a dreadful matter in Bengal. But the threat had its effect, and a minute later one of the kitmutghars turned up with the rings in his hand. He said the pani-wallah had taken them in order to keep them for the Memsahib until she should return. The story sounded rather fishy, but there might have been something in it, and at home one would have reserved judgment. Not so in India. Bonamalee, who had been genuinely sceptical, no sooner heard this tale than he dashed from the

room. Next moment a fearful squawking was heard, and Clothilde and the Collector's wife following him out, found him on the back verandah violently shaking by the shoulders the pani-wallah, who was a fat oily man, and screeching like a jay the while. The police were sent for, and it then turned out that the pani-wallah was only two months out of gaol in the next district, where he had been serving a sentence for two similar thefts. The most indignant person over the whole affair, after Bonamalee, was our own bearer, John, who explained to Clothilde that the pani-wallah had probably hoped to throw her suspicion upon him,—John,—only he happened to be away in the city at the time. John, about whom a few words are due considering how much he contributed to our comfort and instruction, was a Bengali and a Christian. This combination is thought by many Anglo-Indians to produce the most dreadful native to be found in the length and breadth of the land. 'Even a missionary whom we met, when he heard that we had a Christian for bearer, strongly advised us to see that he did not steal. It seems a pessimistic view for a missionary to take, but the more intelligent realise that it is easier to make converts than

saints in India. They are not deceived into thinking that conversion is the end of their labour, or that the end—whatever it may be—is yet in sight. They know that it is almost easy to get converts among the lowest caste Hindoos. Christianity promises these what their own religion denies them—equality among their fellows. But when they have been baptised, the missionary has still merely got hold of men who not only never had any religious scruples to speak of, nor knew any self-control, but as likely as not turned Christian solely with a view to material advantages. No wonder some of his converts are mistrusted, and that he himself, if he is an intelligent man, is glad if they can be kept as straight as possible.

I do not know that John's backslidings amounted to much, though he might, as he said himself, have been suspected of the pani-wallah's crime, and that without getting much sympathy from the rest of the servants. Not that he was exactly unpopular, but his religion made him a bit of an outsider. If he had also come from a distant place, he would probably have had a very thin time of it. But he belonged to the city, and since Bengalis are at least as parochial as Frenchmen, his birthplace made amends to them

for his religion; nor, beyond calling him "Jhani," which appeared at times to annoy him, did they seem in any way to make things unpleasant for him. He would not in any case have been particularly open to snubs. There was about him a meek obstinacy and timid self-satisfaction which would have rendered pin-pricks of small avail. He could talk English a little, write beautifully, sympathise intimately with his employers, and generally count himself a member of a larger and more important, as well as more moral, world than the other servants knew, and all this without giving up the habits and customs, and even the superstitions, which are dear to a man born in Bengal. He was fond of his rights, and is one of the only men I have met who endured a bad cold in the head in order to get them. Clothilde it was who first found that John was developing a bad cold, which showed itself aggravated by a nasty hacking cough. She was so impressed by it that she suggested remedies, but John only turned up his eyes at her and went on suffering. The cough at last became so bad that Clothilde again spoke to him about it; whereupon John said sombrely—

"I come on verandah in early mornings when

it is much cold to be ready to bring chota haziri to Memsahib. I not have enough clothes." He pointed to his cotton garment, which was indeed miserably thin for the almost frosty mornings.

"But you should wear more," said Clothilde. "Why don't you?"

"I not given clothes," replied John sadly. "The other servants have clothes. The burra Memsahib gives to all a winter clothe, but not to John."

"It must be a mistake," said Clothilde, and promised to make inquiries about it. When she approached the Collector's wife on the subject, the latter would only rather laugh at her, and call John a rogue.

"Why?" demanded Clothilde, indignant on behalf of her bearer.

"Because he's trying to impose upon you," said the Collector's wife. "It's quite true that I give the other servants a garment. They get one for the hot weather and one for the cold. But I told John when we got him for you that as he was only coming on trial for a few days he couldn't expect to be treated just like all the others, until we were sure he was going to stay. He is just martyring himself for your benefit."

"But he has got a cold," said Clothilde.

"They can get anything they want," said the Collector's wife out of her greater experience.

Certainly John got a garment. Not the green outside coat which the servants of the house wore and which he had set his heart on, but a sort of flannel vest which Clothilde asked as a special favour to be allowed to give him. It cost a rupee, and he appeared in it in great pride the very next day. And not only that did he now wear. Satisfied that his rights had at last been respected, he wore in place of his thin cotton jacket a magnificent mustard-coloured coat of cloth, together with several other under garments which almost turned him into a stout man. Later on, he appeared in so many and such various apparels that we concluded that he must own privately a second-hand clothes shop, as very likely he did. Consider, however, his tenacity. Any or all of these clothes he could have put on in the first instance, and thus have preserved his health intact. They were there in his possession—the accumulated garments of years. But no; he had been done out of the one coveted thing—value a rupee—to which he felt he had a right, and there was no likelihood

of his becoming the possessor of it unless he roused Clothilde's sympathy. Therefore he caught cold—a genuine cold—coughed terribly for several days—Clothilde said he nearly had bronchitis—and got his vest.

John belonged rather to the back verandah than to the front, whence nevertheless, as I have said, one could in the course of the day see most of the servants at their business. The dhobie would pass in view walking beside his donkey which carried the weekly wash upon its back; the grass cuts would trudge past with the bundles of dried brown grass they had been out to cut for the ponies; not far off the gwallah, a spindly little man, might be seen milking his spindlier little cow with the calf playing alongside. No Bengali cowman is capable of milking a cow unless there is a calf to start the process, which, once when we were in camp and a leopard came in the night and carried off the calf, caused us to endure a considerable shortage of milk. At a highly respectful distance the sweepers' children could be seen, small and brown and naked, playing very happily in spite of their loathly lineage—distinctly the fattest children to be found anywhere round, for the simple reason

that they alone had no caste, and could eat the defiling remnants from the Sahib's table. All day a great kite would hover over the garden in case he could rob these plump ones or the lean pie dogs of some unguarded bone; and, punctually at dusk, the flying-foxes that had slept all day in the cotton-trees by the kutcherry, hanging head downwards in long rows from every bough, each screeching and biting at his neighbour even in his dreams, would pass high up on a night foray among the fruit-trees. One by one they would pass by—an incredibly long procession—in muffled flight such as night birds use—great bats, looking like immense shadows of themselves upon the darkness.

CHAPTER VII.

"HAMLET" AT A BENGAL FAIR.

It was at an Up-country Fair in Bengal that we saw "Hamlet" played by a native company, and it rounded off our fairing in an instructive and delightful way. We had gone to the Fair —the Collector and his wife and two babes, Clothilde and I—because the Collector had been asked to open it, and the rest of us wanted to go. We travelled by means of one tonga, four ponies, and two elephants, one of the elephants acting as perambulator when the tonga got stuck at particularly bad bits of the road. We did the forty miles in two days, which is good travelling for Bengal, especially as we got a leopard on the road. Speaking exactly, the leopard was off the road about three hundred yards, in a grass jungle. A little cloud of vultures circling over it, waiting for it to finish its

meal, gave us the clue to its whereabouts. It was wounded by the first bullet, and made a spring for Clothilde's legs, Clothilde being on the pad of our second elephant, but it missed its spring, and the next shot finished it.

Apart from the leopard, the dust was the most noticeable thing on the road, especially as we drew near to the Fair in the afternoon of the second day. If there had been any wind we should have been buried by the dust. Two hundred acres of sandy sun-baked plain crowded with street after street of booths, alive with a hundred thousand natives, and countless elephants, camels, cattle, and ponies. That was the Fair, and the whole air tingled with the dust of it, and we gulped it down red-hot from the sun as we rode in. Doctor Johnson never drank at a sitting. more tea than I did when we arrived at the Dak bungalow.

From its verandah there was plenty of Fair life to be seen without stirring. Bhutanese, sturdy pig-tailed buccaneers, rode past driving before them a herd of their shaggy little ponies —the sort Bengali sub-inspectors of police love to acquire and ride, partly because they have superbly flowing manes and tails, partly because

they can be cantered twenty miles without stopping under an Indian sun. These ponies, like Nicholas Nickleby at Dotheboys Hall, are remarkable for their straight legs. The ordinary Bengali tat, ridden or burdened from its cradle, never has straight legs, and an Englishman told me of one he had borrowed for the day whose legs were set at such weird angles that it could not stand up until he got on its back. Then his weight pressed them in the directions necessary for balance, and it went with spirit after dacoits. After the Bhutanese, and swallowing their dust, would go bullock-carts bringing merchants' wares, the drivers walking; then, perhaps, the merchant himself, magnificent on a tat going cuddam, bath-slippers on feet that nearly touched the ground, and no stirrups. It is a curious pace, this cuddam, and I do not know if it obtains outside of India. The pony using it seems to flicker or shiver along, and there is no more motion for its rider than for a lady in a bath-chair. It is eminently suited for the Babu, being both slow and comfortable, and I take it that the nearest English equivalent to it was the amble of the monks of Chaucer's time on their way to Canterbury.

Then a north-country man would go by on a camel, and some local Zemindar would trot his native devil-eared horse past us as fast as it would go, in the hope that we were watching and admiring. We did watch for a time, and afterwards Clothilde and I set out for the Fair. The formal opening was to be next day, but we wanted to see it by ourselves first, and without ceremony. The desire was a vain one. Almost before we had passed the gate leading in, we were sighted by a policeman, who either wished to earn merit or to assert a brief authority. At any rate, he constituted himself our vanguard, and after that, peace and privacy were impossible. Authority in this country — where, according to the Babu, liberty calls loudly to the soul of every man — is not regarded as a means to an end. It is an end in itself and a veritable passion. If a Bengali sees a chance of bullying he will take it, and his fellows will accept the part of victims with almost equal ardour. Our way through the Fair, crowded though it was, was clear enough, since we only wanted to stroll along examining the booths at our leisure. But the policeman would not have it so. To left or to right he would dart, shoving

some poor unfortunate who might, conceivably have been in our way had we been going that way. The person shoved would seek credit by shoving the man nearest him, who would shove the next, who would shove a boy, who would shove a smaller boy. Nobody seemed to mind. Indeed they all seemed to enjoy it except ourselves, who wanted peace instead of this hurly-burly, and could not command the policeman in his native tongue. We were rescued by coming across Mr Chundar.

I had met Mr Chundar once before. He was a middle-aged Bengali Babu, engaged as estate agent and general factotum to the Rajah upon whose grounds the Fair was held. Under Mr Chundar's ægis the Fair took shape, and he was responsible for its success or failure. But his chief glory was that he was a Barrister-at-law of — let us, say, at random — the Middle Temple. Barristers-at-law in this country enjoy a certain dignity and distinction. Mr Chundar also enjoyed what dignity a solar topi and a frock-coat and trousers might give him. But it was some years since he had trod the Middle Temple, and I suppose that he had forgotten that with a frock-coat one used not to wear in the Middle Temple an old pair of white canvas shoes

with the laces unfastened, nor such a deprecatingly hang-dog smile. Perhaps responsibility did not weigh upon him then. Now, he went in terror of the Rajah and the Rajah's mother and the Rajah's brother and the two-year-old highly pleasing heir of the Rajah. To all of these, and to anybody else whom it seemed well to propitiate, he presented a cowed appearance which was—for a Barrister-at-law of the Middle Temple—unusual and even disconcerting. I know he disconcerted me, and when I mentioned him to a planter friend he declined to see the humorous side of him. He said that it was improper that natives should be granted what is known in Bengal to be an English distinction, in order that they may qualify as upper servant to a scion of Bengal nobility. He said that if Benchers realised the work sometimes undertaken by the natives they admit as barristers, they would devise some means of preventing this honourable degree from being granted to persons (he snorted the word persons) who can do nothing but lower it (and with it the idea of English honours generally) in the mind of his fellow-countrymen. There is something in this view. There are, I believe, natives of India —barristers-at-law—employed by Zemindars who

can afford them just in order that their legal attainments may be held as a menace over oppressed and recalcitrant tenants. As though some intelligent financier in this country should perpetually retain a leading K.C. to terrorise ruined shareholders from seeking redress.

Thus may our Western watchdogs of the law be turned into wolves—in frock-coats and old white tennis-shoes with the laces undone.

All the same, we were grateful for the appearance of Mr Chundar at that point in the Fair, for he spoke English, and though he did not sympathise with us, and appeared to be a little shocked by our desire for peace and privacy, he did, when I insisted, rid us of the policeman. Left to ourselves, we went up and down the booths. It was essentially a country Fair—a Fair for the ryot,—and though there were some local industries represented, "Made in Birmingham" or "Made in Germany" stared at one from most of the stuffs and wares. Not so with the animals, of course. Neither Frankfurt nor Birmingham can produce live elephants or camels, and the ponies were all native. Fairly good elephants were to be had for about two thousand rupees. The camels were poor and thin. The keen Northerners had not

brought of their best to this Southron market. We saw more of these animals on the following day, for after the opening ceremony we were escorted to a small circular racecourse, set in the middle of the Fair, to witness some camel races. When I say "we," I mean the Collector and friends and Rajah and suite. We took our seats on a set of drawing-room furniture upholstered in green brocaded satin, which had been brought from the Rajah's house and placed ready for us under a canopy. A local band was also ready for us, and struck up "God save the King" as soon as we appeared. The tune was sonorously rendered, but the bandsmen had not that *esprit de corps* that some conductors insist on, and several of the musicians wandered into other tunes that may have been more beautiful but did not tone in.

Perturbed, perhaps, by the music, the first contingent of camels, four in number, refused to start. Their riders did their best, and the Barrister-at-law, in his white tennis-shoes, addressed them at some length, at first imperiously and then with tears in his eyes, but the camels would not budge, and had to be withdrawn.

Graceful conversation by the Rajah carried us

over this little hitch, and the second line of camels was brought forward. Again the band struck up, and again the camels exhibited a puritanical objection to racing. The Barrister-at-law became frantic; he skipped in his tennis-shoes and waved his arms commandingly. His efforts were useless. The bandsmen, entranced by this struggle of wits between the Babu and the beasts, strayed into all sorts of keys and tunes, some of them forgetting to play altogether. Suddenly three of the camels started. For some ten yards they ran a neck-and-neck race; then two of them hit their shins against the hurdles between which they were racing, and collapsed like a pack of cards. There is nothing goes down so dramatically and so completely as a camel. The third creature was made of sterner stuff. Annoyed by being compelled to start, and enraged by the strains of the band, the brute, without stopping, turned its head right round and made maddened efforts to eat its rider. It was an interesting sight, the unfortunate rider slipping farther and farther back to escape that long snarling neck, the camel galloping *ventre à terre*, with its head serpentined round, and its nose and lips all mixed in a spitting, biting fury. It was better than a race; it was a duel, and we

watched it fascinated. Would the camel complete the circle without devouring its rider, or would the latter, by deft tugging, bring it to a stop? The unexpected happened. Rider and camel both being taken up by their internecine strife, forgot that their course lay between hurdles, and in the midst of a peculiarly vicious snap lost their direction and knocked a hurdle down. For a moment the camel paused, startled by the noise and the presence of the excited onlookers. Then perceiving directly in front of it the Rajah and ourselves—a strange and offensive group—it came straight at us, screaming with passion. With remarkable presence of mind we all rose at once and placed the drawing-room suite between ourselves and the infuriated beast.

Another six paces and it would be on us. The band had ceased to play, the crowd hummed with suppressed horror. In the distance I saw the Barrister-at-law awaiting with horror-struck eyes and clasped hands the inevitable catastrophe. Then with a superhuman effort the rider gave a last tug at the rope-bridle, and the camel fell in folds before us.

"I think he ought to get the prize," said the Collector's wife to the Rajah, as we reseated our-

selves with all the dignity possible under the circumstances. The Rajah smiled courteously, and said that the camel was an animal uncertain to ride, but useful, especially in the North. Still, he cast a menacing look at Mr Chundar when that Barrister-at-law came up to regret the unfortunate issue of the camel race, and to consult his Honour as to whether this camel, as having kept its feet longest, was to be adjudged the victor, or whether it should be disqualified, as having maliciously made for his Honour's party with intent to damage. The Collector's wife decided sportingly in favour of the fighting camel, and the band seized this moment to give us "God save the King" again. To restore us we had tea and cake of the wedding pattern handed round, and after that we inspected the prize-winning cattle. The prize cow gave two and a half quarts of milk, and the second gave two, and their prize-worthiness was not wholly apparent to the naked eye. Prizes to encourage the cattle industry of a district are excellent things, but it seems even these may be put to wrong uses. My friend, the planter, told me of a Zemindar, in a district he had once known, whose tenants were always the winners of the rupees he offered as prizes. The reason they

won was that they could be made to give the rupees back more promptly and easily than could the tenants of outsiders.

I hoped that this was cynicism, or at least a solitary example of the misuse of prize-money at cattle-shows. No doubt there is a temptation in India to appear charitable without being so. There is a temptation in all countries, but India has its peculiar variety. How? It is a vast place, with many landholders in it, all filled with an amiable desire to distinguish themselves. In order to become distinguished under the British Raj it is well to assist the common-weal in some form. Charity, such as is involved in the offering of prize-money for cattle-breeding, is a simple and straightforward form of assisting the common-weal. But suppose that you are but a poor man, though a landholder. Why, then be charitable still, but drop the straightforwardness. It is just as simple not to be straightforward. Give the prize-money as before, but see that you get it back again. If that is too extreme a thing to do, and it is, there are many other ways in which charity in India works out a little less simply than it is supposed to do. You

will perhaps meet a rich Zemindar who puts down his name for a large donation to some well-advertised and well-advertising public work, and forgets to forward the cheque when called upon. Another will send a generous yearly subscription—for the first year only.

I seem to be wandering from the Fair, and the chief event in it, which was the performance of "Hamlet." It took place later in the day, beginning at eight o'clock, and lasting until after midnight. It was a Command Performance, to which the Rajah had invited us, and it was therefore not to be witnessed without due ceremonies. We had "God save the King" as we entered, and were ushered by the Barrister-at-law to the drawing-room suite in green brocaded satin from which we had been privileged to watch the camel-fight. It was now the front row of the stalls in the big marquee that constituted the theatre. We had "God save the King" about two minutes later, when the Rajah and party entered, and it may be said on this subject generally that if repetition of this tune can be taken as the best assurance of loyalty, nobody in Bengal need have the least doubt of its prevalence there.

Hardly were we all seated when Clothilde and I, being less experienced than the rest, leapt from our seats as a bomb exploded one pace from us, followed by two more in swift succession. They were, of course, only salutes — tributes to our combined importance,—but they left me somewhat deaf for the rest of the evening. I cannot say I was sorry for this, because of the orchestra. The orchestra was composed of two players. It was not the band of the morning, that had made the camels so restive. That band was somewhere outside, and was only used when "God save the King" was required. The inside orchestra consisted of (1) a harmonium-player on the left wing of the stage; (2) a tom-tom player on the right. For many minutes that evening these two monopolised our attention. The harmonium-player was a young, slim Bengali in a coat and *dhoti*, patent-leather shoes, and what used to be called in England a polo cap—a brown, pork-pie-shaped cap set jauntily on one side of his head. His action on the harmonium was inimitably careless and graceful. No European master, I venture to think, has ever expressed such contemptuous mastery over his instrument. He would play it with one hand, daringly, as a novice rides a bicycle to show

off to a friend, while with the other he fetched betel from his waist-band and transferred it to his mouth; or he would in an ecstasy of abandonment, crash both fists on to the harmonium, crossing the keyboard and coming back again before one could stiffen one's muscles to bear it. I have not heard a musician like him either before or since. I am not skilled in music, nor do I know the Indian notation. But one is accustomed to regard the harmonium as a sober instrument. Conceive it in all its long-drawn, reverberating fulness attacked by something as wild as a jungle-cat, as heavy as a jungle-boar, and you have some idea of the excruciating sounds which that young man in the polo cap extracted from it. Compared with him the tom-tom player—a square person, who sat on a small kitchen-table, with his bare feet protruding into the stalls—was a soothing nonentity. When he played his loudest—which he often did—he only slightly subdued the nerve-stretching ululations of the harmonium-player. Moreover, they rarely combined or got on to their stroke together. I could not make out the rules, but I fancy they played when they felt like it. When the harmonium was too intent on betel-chewing to play up, the tom-tom droned away for

a few minutes. When the harmonium, refreshed by the leaf, dashed himself at the most discordant notes he could find, the tom-tom took a breathing space. Sometimes, like two omnibus-drivers moved to rivalry, they raced one another on their respective instruments, but there was never any question as to which won. The tom-tom was distinctly second fiddle.

What—it may be asked—had this orchestra to do with "Hamlet"? What—as far as that goes—has any orchestra to do with "Hamlet"? As a matter of fact, this pair was pretty busily engaged, for "Hamlet" in Bengali is—if I may attempt a definition—a musical tragedy of imbroglio. Whenever the action palled (and there was lots of action) one of the players sang a song—not so much accompanied by the orchestra as defied by it. Hamlet himself was the only man that had a chance against the harmonium, and that was due to the penetratingly nasal quality of his voice. Again, I have never heard any one so nasal as Hamlet. He reminded me sometimes of a Swiss yodeler heard near by; sometimes of a Venetian boatman singing "Funicoli-funicola" on the water outside one's window. He never reminded me of Hamlet.

Here, before I enlarge upon the acting, I will set down, act by act, the programme of the play, of which the plot was specially printed for us in English, so that we might understand. "The plot in short," it is called. It lies before me as I write. I give it as printed.

"The first scene opens with the King chatting with the Queen in a room in the castle. He then feels drousy and subsequently falls asleep; whereupon, the Queen sends for her husband's brother Farrukh and induces him to drop poison in his ear. The King dies of its effects, and the Queen gives out, importunately attributing the cause to a serpent's bite. Jahangir mourns his father's death and Akhtar, his friend and associate, comforts him."

This, it will be observed, is Shakespeare, though not in the order we know it. Liberties have been taken, but what actors have not taken them? The point to be noticed is that the plot serves India admirably. Look at the Queen importunately attributing her husband's death to a serpent's bite. It is thoroughly Bengali. Official returns of to-day attribute an enormous proportion of deaths among natives to snake-bite; individuals say that the variety of snake is a human one. Anyhow, the pit understands.

Jahangir is, of course, Hamlet. In his make-up he conformed to the English tradition so far as to wear Hamlet's black cloak. Otherwise he was an innovator. He wore rowing shorts, puttees, and a pair of football boots; also a big pistol in his girdle, such as highwaymen used to carry, and, fully exposed like a decoration, a large gun-metal watch and chain over his heart. We supposed at first from its calibre that the watch was merely a decoration, but this was not the case. It had a dramatic value too. You remember the famous lines in Act III.:—

"'Tis now the very witching time of night,
When churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out
Contagion to this world: now could I drink hot blood,
And do such bitter business as the day
Would quake to look on."

Well, Hamlet wanted to make quite sure that it was the very witching time of night when he could drink hot blood, and he consulted the gun-metal watch accordingly. There was a pleasing accuracy about this that seems to indicate that the actor took the view that Hamlet's madness was only feigned.

What with the watch and the pistol, Hamlet's

was a sporting rather than a historical make-up, and I think Akhtar (Horatio) was rather envious of it. He was somewhat of a Job's comforter, but nothing was likely to quell Hamlet's mourning. In Bengal it had to be of a pristine ceremonial order. There was no possible doubt about its intensity. He simply "waked" his Father, and, with the assistance of the harmonium, approached the banshee at its best. One felt that some action was bound to ensue, and Act II. was in the circumstances a little disappointing. Here is the syllabus of it:—

"At the opening of the second act Farrukh in court putting on the guise of anxiety for Jahangir's safety shows concerns and inquiries. Mansoor the Wazirzada falls in love with Meharbano. Suleman enters and a conversation passes on. Akhtar recounts the accident of the grave to Suleman. Seeing Jahangir entering, Suleman withdraws. Akhtar questions Jahangir who confides him with the disclosure. Mansoor in frenzy declares his love for her,"

"Her" is, of course, Meharbano or Ophelia. The chief interest of this act consisted in the introduction of the characters new to Shakespeare. Mansoor the Wazirzada was the most important in rank, but Suleman was more im-

portant dramatically. He was, so to speak, the Shakespearian clown Indianised. Later he became the First Gravedigger. The thing about him was that he was a black man, not a brown one. That was the comedy of him. The audience laughed when they saw him. Everything he said was a joke. I could not make out quite what his relations were to the other characters, but I do not think they greatly mattered. The clown may enter anywhere. He gives relief, and in this act one was grateful for relief. The acting was all very emotionally pronounced, and the harmonium was at his most energetic.

"With next scene we come to a room where the Queen is seen merrymaking with Farrukh. Then enters Humayun the Lord Chamberlain who, soon after, is despatched to console the Prince. The Queen, then, gives publicity to her union with Farrukh. Meanwhile the Wazir tries to solace the Prince who hears him with flightiness and cynical disdain, and pours forth in soliloqy his horror at his Mother's marriage."

"Soliloqy" hardly expresses the prolonged and rampant vocalism to which Hamlet, undeterred by the harmonium and the tom-tom, treated us. But here again, of course, his horror had to be

very great. Not only was his Queen Mother marrying her husband's murderer, but she was remarrying; and to a Hindu Hamlet a widow's marriage would justify any outburst. The Queen's action represented shamelessness and passion, or was supposed to; but none of the women in the play showed any emotion comparable with that of the men. It would not have been proper, or, presumably, like real life. This took away a good deal of the interest of Ophelia, who had her chance in Act IV., as the programme shows:—

"Meharbano's giving went to her love for Jahangir. Her maids-of-honour soothing her. Jahangir's going to his Father's grave. Akhtar's and Suleman's oversighting him. The openning of the grave. The appearing of the Ghost and informing him of his death."

Meharbano gave, it seemed to me, the very meekest possible "went" to her love for Jahangir, and her maids-of-honour had little or no difficulty in soothing her, though they spread their consolations over a considerable period. Meharbano was a small artiste, with the voice of a field-mouse. She had on a cherry-coloured satin dress, which reached barely to her knees, and — with

a view to captivating Hamlet, no doubt—a pair of European black stockings. No shoes. The exceedingly loose fit of the stockings led to an unintentional piece of by-play at one point. She was giving "went" to her love by squeezing a tiny pocket-handkerchief, of which she made a good deal of use throughout, passing it through her fingers and laying it on her breast, when she accidentally dropped it. In Bengal, when you drop a thing, there is no bothering to stoop and pick it up. You use your foot. One of the courtiers—not very courteously—nudged Ophelia, and pointed to the fallen handkerchief. Absent-mindedly she put out one big toe at it gracefully, half raised it, and then had the mortification of seeing it fall again. She had forgotten her stockings, prisoned in which her prehensile toe had lost its cunning. She had to bend down to get it. If this act gave Ophelia her opportunity, it also gave Hamlet his—at the graveside. That was after the appearance of the Ghost, who looked, it must be allowed, more English than the rest of the *dramatis personæ*, and had a fairly good speaking part. Roused by his tale, Hamlet did a sword-dance, preparatory to taking vengeance. It was a great effort, that dance, lasting roughly

for ten minutes, Hamlet doing Indian clubs with his sword, and shrieking at the top of his voice throughout. The young man at the harmonium appeared to be really moved by it, and, as it were, challenged Hamlet to musical combat. The conclusion was a foregone one. Hamlet did his best, and it was a good best, but a man cannot contend with a harmonium indefinitely. The young instrumentalist reduced Hamlet to a hoarse impotence in the end, and went on by himself for a minute or two, just to show what an agony of organ notes the harmonium can give forth when the master wills it. After this, Act V., though full of incident, seemed in its way quiet. The following events took place:—

"Mansoor's and Sahelin's jesting with each other in the way. His going in the garden with their help. Declaring his love to Meharbano. Her declining. Coming of Jahangir and his killing Mansoor. Coming of everyone in the Tamasagah. Farrukh and Jahangir witnessing performance. The death of all."

The programme is not perfectly clear. As far as I remember, it was Mansoor who got into the garden "with their help." Anyhow he was in the garden, and Jahangir came and killed him. He killed him by coming up behind and shooting

him in the back with a shiny new rook rifle. Some one must have given Jahangir the rook rifle at the end of Act IV., perhaps instead of a bouquet. I feel sure he had not possessed it before, or he would have brought it on. The wound produced by it, besides being mortal, was of a very painful nature, and Mansoor depicted it with consummate skill. Indeed, apart from Hamlet's sword-dance, and the death of all, which followed later, there was nothing more appreciated by the audience. On the English stage deaths are for the most part swift, if dramatic. In Italian opera they take longer very often, but the efforts of the artistes are concentrated rather upon getting their notes out successfully than upon depicting the postures and writhings in unduly harrowing last throes. Singers are too careful of themselves, and, as a rule, too stout to writhe convincingly. There were no such disabilities here. Mansoor had set a sublime example, and all, when death came upon them, strove to equal his performance. I do not know why the death of all occurred, but it did so quite suddenly—I should say, it began to do so quite suddenly,—and, though it came in the form of the poison cup,

pistol shots, and the stab of a dagger, it came with similar lingering, writhing, hair-raising preliminaries. Ophelia retained her breath the longest, and there was in her end a distinct touch of the star actress. She had stabbed herself in good time with a very large stage dagger wrought of wood and silver paper which puckered, but she reserved her death for the last. She allowed about a quarter of an hour for the others to writhe, and then staggered to the front and was about to fall. A difficulty presented itself. The stage was so packed with the dead bodies that space adequate for the decease of the heroine was lacking, at any rate in the front. Ophelia showed the practical common-sense that has before now distinguished artistes. Nothing daunted by the affair of the handkerchief, she again used her foot to kick one of the crowd in the ribs. With one of those convulsive spasms that have been known to occur even after death, he jerked himself to one side. Hamlet was the other too forward corpse, but a poke in his back enabled him to perform the same phenomenon. Then Ophelia could really abandon herself to die, and did so. . . .

There was sustained applause from the whole theatre, particularly from the front row of the stalls, and, after it was over, Mr Chundar, who had been busy between the acts handing us chocolate and biscuits, came up to find out what we thought of the performance.

"You like it? You think it was well acted?" he asked us, smiling, but with an anxious eye on the Rajah at the same time.

We all declared that we liked it immensely, and that it had been acted very finely indeed, and Mr Chundar's smile expanded and expanded. Only the Rajah had yet to speak, and he, judging that we had been pleased and satisfied, and that none of the failure attaching to the camel races could be assigned to this performance, said very graciously, "Yes. It was well acted. You shall tell the company that they did well." And he added courteously to me, who sat on one side of him, "It is a good little play. Yes."

Next moment the band outside struck up "God save the King" for positively the last time, and to these loyal strains we walked out into the Bengal night. It was a lovely night. The stars glittered from a black velvet sky, and in the starlight, as we

drove back, we could see the shrouded Bengalis shuffling home along the dusty road. Though we had, all of us, been seeing Shakespeare's "Hamlet," I had the strange feeling that we were moving in some time and place that were pre-Shakespearian.

CHAPTER VIII.

SPEECH DAY IN CROCODILE COUNTRY.

IN Bengal, things get strangely associated in one's mind, and somehow that Speech Day at a Bengali school is mixed up for me with the crocodiles I saw during the long ride we made to get to the school. I believe that the crocodiles interested me more than the speeches. That is no reflection upon the speeches. Crocodiles have a fascination for me, and they are certainly fixed in my memory far more than any of the other creatures I saw in Bengal. They are so much more numerous than any of the other creatures, such as tigers or snakes. One hears a good deal about the snakes there, but one sees very little of them at any time, and in the cold weather nothing at all. Indeed the only snakes I saw were two great pythons which a planter kept in one of his indigo vats for his private delectation. He loved to watch them and

feed them, and poke them with a stick, and see their flat vicious heads drive at it with the speed and force of a steam-hammer. His wife liked them less because one of them had once escaped from the vat and wandered into her bedroom. It was daytime and she was resting from the heat, and hearing it advance, breathing heavily, she thought it was her somewhat asthmatical fox-terrier and told it to lie down. As it seemed to be making for her bed instead, she looked up to find that it was one of the pythons looking for a warm place in which to lie up. Her screams brought her husband, who, annoyed by this escapade of a pet which his wife had never properly appreciated, thoughtlessly seized it by the neck, with the result that in a twinkling it had knotted itself round his arm and nearly pulped it before his bearer could arrive and get it by the tail. Two men, it seems, can deal with a python fairly effectively, by grasping each an end of it, thus preventing it weaving itself into the coils that crush. But no single man is of much use, for the reason that he cannot in the nature of things grasp and keep taut an eighteen-foot length of writhing muscle. The planter told me that, as it was, his arm had turned black and blue all over, as if it had been

squeezed into a heavy door, and it was weeks before he could use it. But he still loved his python. I do not think any one could love a crocodile, and personally I could never become even indifferent to them. They are such nightmares of creatures, especially when seen in quantities as I saw them that day. We were twenty or thirty miles from the station, and the Collector and I were walking our ponies through a great stretch of grass jungle, in which nothing was to be seen but a few feet of the track ahead, when there appeared to our right a sudden gap in the grass. Riding up to it, we found that it marked the brink of a big unmapped river which ran in its bed some four feet below. There, on a sandbank, so that you could have dropped pebbles on to their noses, lay not less than fifty crocodiles of all shapes and sizes, muggers and fish-eaters, sprawled side by side or at right angles, some only a few feet long, some looking to be fully eighteen feet. The Collector declared that no up-country crocodile attained that length, though the muggers of the Sunderbunds do, so I will only repeat that they looked it, as they lay there on the whitish-yellow sand, the jungle grass barely quivering above them, basking in the sun as they might have basked at

the beginning of time. The nearest village was miles away, and the whole scene was as it might have been a thousand years before. Neither then nor now had these creatures any enemy to fear except for the few jungle beasts that might prey on their eggs. Why should they not grow big at their ease, these scavenging lords of a great secret river, which was probably crammed with fish as all the rivers of Bengal are? I did not notice any musky smell of them on the air, as I had somehow expected; they did not therefore offend one's sense of smell, which is, I believe, the origin of repugnance and loathing. Yet creatures more calculated to raise these emotions I have never seen. Their sprawl, their gape, their cold-blooded lethargy—in spite of "their four-chambered heart, distinct sockets for the teeth, and traces of a diaphragm showing an approach in organisation to warm-blooded animals,"—and most of all, that reptilian smile, form a revolting combination. What extraordinary pathological state can that old Egyptian civilisation have been in which treated these creatures as divinities, worshipping them alive and embalming their hideous carcases after death? Was all that world mad together, and was it the germ of a spiritual sense which

nourished itself on such appalling fancies and by the transfiguring of things so abominable?

Even the writer of Job seems to have taken a horrific joy in the crocodile.

"Who can open the doors of his face? his teeth are terrible round about.

His scales are his pride, shut up together as with a close seal. . . .

Out of his nostrils goeth smoke, as out of a seething pot or caldron. . . .

His heart is as firm as a stone; yea, as hard as a piece of the nether mill-stone. . . .

The arrow cannot make him flee: sling-stones are turned with him into stubble.

Darts are counted as stubble: he laugheth at the shaking of a spear."

A little later in the morning we came to a place where the river crossed the track, and had to wait while the ferry-boat was baled to take us across. A herd of buffaloes were swimming the river as we waited beside the landing-place. They were nothing but a line of noses in the water, with their drover shouting directions from the opposite bank. One or two natives, also waiting for the ferry, watched apathetically from the hot landing-place; a troop of porpoises bobbed away up-stream, and several crocodiles, each on his own

beat, as it were, of the bank, slept through the process, or seemed to. But they slept, head to stream, slanted for the dive in, and I said to the Collector—

"Aren't the men afraid of some of those brutes seizing their animals?"

"I expect there is too much noise going at present for anything to happen," said he, and asked the ferryman, "Do the muggers here take cattle?"

"Yes, Huzoor."

"Many?"

"A few."

"And have you known them to seize people too?"

"There have been seven taken this year," said the ferryman without concern. "Usually it is a big mugger who takes them, of a light colour. Five days ago he took a woman who went to wash. He is a big mugger, and sits close by. To-day he does not show himself."

"No one has shot at him?" inquired the Collector.

"No, Huzoor."

"It's a pity we sent the guns ahead," said the Collector, having translated this to me. "We

might have tried to shoot some of the brutes while we were waiting. Not that one or two more or less would have made much difference."

"Do you mean to say it's a fact that seven people have been killed at this ferry in the year?" I asked.

"It's not at all unlikely," he said. "According to the figures of the district, crocodiles kill three hundred victims per annum. Of course the crocodiles may be helped to get them in some cases, but on the other hand we probably don't learn of all the people that are carried off in out-of-the-way parts. They're absolutely careless about crocodiles. You've seen the way they will go in?"

I had seen it. At just such a place as this, with a crocodile staring at him from the opposite bank, a Bengali wishing to make ablutions will walk down into the water, wade out waist deep and dip completely under the requisite number of times. Afterwards he will stand in the river and wash his garment, if it happens to need washing, as unconcerned as a man in a swimming-bath. I have seen very cautious people before they advanced into the water pick up a stone and throw it in to frighten any mugger that might be lurking in the immediate vicinity. But this

is a mark of rare foresight and prudence. So, as the Collector said, it was hardly to be wondered at if the figures for the district showed three hundred victims of crocodiles in the year. Some of these would be washerwomen seized while they were pounding clothes on a board stretched over the river, as one sees them so often and so picturesquely doing, and others would be little girls. Not infrequently silver bangles are found inside the bodies of shot crocodiles—the silver bangles with which the small girls are adorned from their earliest years. I suppose being small they are easy to seize and drown—easier than the ponies and buffaloes' calves which are also taken in great quantities in the marsh lands. Not that the mugger is slow in action. I was amazed, when I went shooting them a week or two later, at the incredible speed at which on first feeling the bullet they plunge into the stream. Scientists explain that the neck of the crocodile is deprived to a great extent of its mobility because the vertebræ bear upon each other by means of rib-like processes, and its limbs are so short and insufficient that it has to drag its body along the ground. But to see a wounded crocodile leap in one piece into the air—from

bank to stream — is proof that its mobility in some ways is tremendous. For all practical purposes, however, it cannot pursue its human victims, and it is only because familiarity has bred contempt and life is always so cheap in the East that the brutes account for such a monstrous mortality. Could anything be done to alter it? I suppose if the crocodile possessed any commercial value, its rapid decrease and eventual extermination would be assured, but, as things go, it has little or none. The tanning of the belly skins, which is the only part of the animal used, appears to be an intricate and expensive process, and in any case it is the fish-eater's skin that is sought after—not the mugger's. So that, up-country at all events, the mugger is left alone to do as he pleases, and the one useful thing that he chooses to do is to act as scavenger of the waterways; and those who believe in the scourge that cleanses may plead the cause of the crocodile. Those who do not may usefully think out some way of putting an end to him. I remember that for an hour or two after leaving that ferry I thought it would be a very simple thing if Government compelled ferrymen at least to keep all fords and ferries clear of crocodiles.

Ferrymen are not exactly Government officials, for the rights to ferry are, I believe, sold by auction, but they are always bought by the same families, so that the office of ferryman becomes for most purposes a hereditary one. It is a peaceful occupation, and even an apathetic Bengal ferryman might, I thought, if provided with a rifle and an arms licence, find the work of disposing of the crocodiles round his ferry not too laborious. For he has not always even his ordinary ferrying to do, as we learnt at lunch-time that same day, when a deputation of the ferrymen of the district waited on the Collector to say that, the season having been unusually rainless, many of the rivers had gone dry and people could ford or even go dryshod over places where boats were the custom — would not his Honour therefore intercede with the Government to remit to the poor ferrymen some of the purchase-money they had paid to secure the ferry rights? The Collector promised to think the matter over. He agreed that it seemed a distinct misfortune, though he was bound to point out that if a man had bidden for a thing, and the thing turned out less valuable than he supposed, he could not as a rule expect his money back.

Supposing more people than usual had had to use the ferries, the ferrymen would not, he presumed, have offered to pay Government more money than they had actually paid. The deputation of ferrymen departed, only to be succeeded by a deputation of another kind which not even the Collector, with his experience of the ups and downs and general topsy-turviness of existence in Bengal, was quite prepared for, I think. This second deputation consisted of leading inhabitants who came to petition his Honour to know if it was just or right that the ferrymen of the district — seeing that certain waters had gone dry and it was possible for wayfarers to pass them on foot, not using boats—should by threats and violence prevent even the poorest people from walking across unless they first of all paid such toll as was the custom when the ferry-boats were used. The Collector said to this deputation that it was not just or right, and that it should be stopped, and he despatched a message to the previous deputation to say that if he heard of any more of this sort of villainy, ferrymen would not only not have their payments remitted by Government, but they would on the contrary forfeit their posts; and he said to me—"Do you see now why

Bengalis do not like Bengalis in authority over them?"

I did not reply, but I reconsidered my idea of arming the ferrymen with rifles. Simple as the idea had seemed, I saw that its results might be very complicated. For, if the intelligent ferryman unarmed could thus extort money from passers-by, what might he not succeed in doing with the help of a rifle? He would not, of course, actually shoot people with it, who refused to pay him little extra gratuities. He would go about things in a more indirect way. Thus, in his great anxiety to protect a herd of buffalo, such as we had seen swimming across, from a crocodile whom he fancied he saw about to attack, he might shoot into the brown of them, thus saving from the awful fate of being seized by a crocodile two or three at least of these valuable beasts, which would anyhow have met a comparatively painless death by bullet. Or he might merely become known as a zealous man who, though most anxious to clear his part of the river from crocodiles, was, alas! a poor shot, whom wise cattle-drovers would bribe not to do any crocodile-shooting while they were crossing the river—with the result that instead

of the crocodiles getting thinner, the ferrymen would get fatter, and the cattle-drover would lose a percentage to both. I do not suppose a ferryman armed with a rifle would ever shoot by mistake on the opposite bank a friend with whom he had quarrelled—though it might be easy at a distance to mistake such a person for a crocodile. But there would always be the temptation, to a man leading a quiet and sedentary life by day, to go off at night and commit dacoity in a neighbouring village, again not necessarily using violence, but inducing the ignorant villager to disclose the coffer beneath his bed containing that coin which he will not trust to the Post Office Savings Bank, by representing to him that he is an emissary of the Government, armed by the British Raj with the very fine and powerful rifle to be noticed under his arm, but capable of using the power of which that rifle is a symbol with moderation and discretion, provided the contents of the coffer be immediately handed over.

Proceedings so simple and logical and difficult to bring home would be quite likely to appeal to some Bengalis armed with rifles for the extirpation of crocodiles.

We rode for some hours through this curious crocodile country, and came in due course to the little town whose school was to have its speech-day and prize-giving that afternoon.

It is strange at the back of Bengal, where the plough-land and the jungle march side by side, and the plough gains very slowly on the jungle and the jungle gains very speedily on the plough, to find schools at all. But it is stranger still to think that while tigers roam in the dog-rose scrub a few yards away, and crocodiles lurk in all the waters, uninterruptedly exacting their toll of a calf or a parent, little Bengalis are in these schools mastering the mysteries of our Occidental civilisation. From pot-hooks, which are, I suppose, the invention of some great educationist of the past (I never heard his name, and seven cities do not appear to contest the honour of his birth-place), they go on to learn, from their English reading-books, that The Cat ate the Rat, the Rat is not the Bat, the Bat has no Hat; and having acquired these simple and euphonious truths, proceed by forced marches to the stage where they can finish their education by cramming the doctrines of Herbert Spencer, the philosopher who, both literally and figuratively, put cotton

wool into his ears when he did not wish to hear what other people had to say. It is open to wonder how Herbert Spencer would have enjoyed Bengal, had Fate in a whimsical moment ever landed him there. Finding so many disciples ready made by nature to assimilate his philosophy, he should have been happy. The Babus would have welcomed him with agonising smiles —as a master and a brother—and repeated to him with respectful adulation his own dry sentences redecorated with all the flowers of the East. They would have wanted to sit and talk to him all day about the Progress of Humanity and the Beauty of Civilisation.

They would have wanted to talk shrilly and exultantly and without ceasing, and I think in a very short time he would have wanted to get out his cotton wool. In a Calcutta boarding-house, in the cold weather, he would have been happy perhaps — for a while. But he would have liked the hot weather less, and the jungle not at all. He was particular and even fussy about the details of daily life, and if his bearer had forgotten to boil his milk, or his cook had given him a stale fish or unwashed salad for tiffin — with the usual consequences—he would,

I think, have had something sharp to say to either of those companions of the march of progress, — something that a native paper, if it got hold of it, would have construed as arrogant, and even tyrannical.

This, however, is speculation, and not directly connected with the speech day I wish to describe.

The ceremony had been arranged to take place outside the school itself, which was a large building accommodating some hundreds of children; and in order to screen all the distinguished visitors who were expected from the heat of the sun, a roofing of bright canvas had been erected and fastened to poles in the compound. In theory the poles had been driven securely into the ground, in order that they might support the weight of the awning; but the ground was very hard and the holes for the poles difficult to make. In reality, therefore, the poles were but lightly inserted, and threatened to give at almost any moment, to prevent which fiasco the schoolmaster, a slim and bright young Bengali, had impressed certain friends, retainers, and proud parents to stand clutching the poles, so that this Damoclean roof never entirely came

to earth. Indeed its only real inconvenience was that, being but imperfectly attached to the tops of the well-grasped poles, it fluttered away from them at various points as time went by, leaving large gaps through which the sun streamed with concentrated violence. There was a particularly pernicious gap of this kind left over the two central chairs on the platform occupied by the Collector and his wife, who had arrived by tonga, with the result that they would have been sun-struck about half-way through the afternoon had not one of the members of the School Board Committee bethought himself of sending for a big umbrella, which was supported over their honours' heads by three servants, and produced a highly impressive effect.

The rest of us—four other English people and a score of resplendent Babus representing the Law, Education, and Public Beneficence (one or two had presented sums of money to the school) —took what shelter we could find, while the school was ranged in bright-coloured ranks in the full sun. The prizes were spread on a table at the Collector's right hand, and consisted mainly of cheaply printed and bound English books, such as 'Jessica's First Prayer,' 'The

Wide, Wide World,' and other improving Victorian works, richly calculated to impress the little Hindus and Mahomedans who might be so lucky as to have won them with the greatness of our Empire and the virile character of our literature.

The proceedings opened with speeches. The schoolmaster began with a very eloquent discourse on the advantages of education. He said that education was a very great thing, and that by learning to read books one could acquire the wisdom of all the ages. By studying English books one could acquire the wisdom of the English ages, and by studying Bengali books one could acquire the wisdom of the Bengali ages. Collectively this would make a very great deal of wisdom which it would be a very great privilege to acquire. Not only boys could acquire this wisdom, but also girls—of whom there were several at the school—could acquire it by constant study and close attention to their books. Parents would be gratified to think that these privileges were open to their children, and that they were due in no small part to the unparalleled generosity and munificence of their old and highly-esteemed fellow-citizen, Babu Chundar

Ram, who had presented no less than Rs. 2000 for the extension of the facilities of education in his native town. All present would join with him in expressing a sense of gratitude to Babu Chundar Ram for giving these opportunities of acquiring the wisdom of the ages. Children yet unborn—not only male children but also female children—would bless the name of Babu Chundar Ram, their great fellow-townsman and educationist. He felt also that the meeting would be with him in expressing delight at the presence at the prize-giving of his Honour the Collector and District Magistrate, whose interest in education was so well known, and who was always delighted to assist the children in attaining the wisdom of the ages. . . .

The Collector's views on education in India are of a mixed nature, while his horror of rhetoric may be best described as positive; still, he managed to retain an impassive gravity during the subdued applause that greeted this speech. I knew that inwardly he must be feeling qualms, because he has at times an unpleasantly practical turn to his mind; and I remember that at a smaller school which we had previously inspected, where the schoolmaster was expecting

him to examine the scholars in their progress in English literature and the world's geography, he had disconcerted all by asking, firstly, how far their village was from Calcutta, and how they would set about getting to Calcutta from it; and, secondly, whether it was safer as a rule in the jungle to drink from standing water or from running water if they did not want to die.

The second speech was from a legal Babu, who had the heads of his speech written down on several sheets of note-paper. He also referred in due sequence to the glories of education, the munificence of Babu Chundar Ram, and the pleasure with which everybody welcomed the presence at their school of that lover and patron of education, the Collector and District Magistrate. He said that some of the children at the school had parents who were but low jungly people who made their living by ploughing the land and had not read the philosophy of the ages; but civilisation and progress were making themselves felt in Bengal, and the children themselves and their children's children would look back with wonder upon a time when geography and the philosophy of the ages was not taught, and people were mere jungly ploughmen.

The third and following speeches were also by Babus, all eloquent in spite of the fact that their leading themes—namely, the glories of education, the munificence of Babu Chundar Ram, and the presence of the Collector — had been set forth with the utmost fulness by their predecessors. They did not seem to mind that. Each seemed to think that his way of reciting the familiar truths which each wished to inculcate would bring them in a very special way to the hearts of those present.

At the end of the speeches the Collector asked the schoolmaster if we might hear some English reading, and a small boy in a very bright pink dhoti was brought forward and reeled off in a very high voice and at a lightning pace all the information contained in his reading-book about the Cat not killing the Rat, the Rat not being the Bat, and the Bat not possessing a Hat. The schoolmaster wore a most gratified smile during the process, and a great deal of unsuppressed admiration was visible in the course of it on the faces of the assembled parents; but as the boy, who had kept his eyes sideways on the Collector's face all the time in order to learn

what impression he was making on the Sahib, evidently knew those pages by heart, the Collector, after saying it had been very nicely done, asked if there could be an exhibition of reading in some unseen part of the book. He turned over the pages himself to make sure of getting at an unthumbed one, and the small boy's face fell. But the schoolmaster rose to what seemed like an emergency, and said with a ready smile, "Certainly, your Honour, a larger boy will do some impromptu reading."

A minute or two later a large, stout, bashful boy was produced, and, having been handed the book, forced his way gamely through the account, I think it was, of a gallant rescue of a child by a fireman, which lost some of its original pathos owing to its being intoned without stops, just in the same way as the story of the Cat, the Bat, and the Hat — syllables appearing to the stout boy to be of infinitely more value in English than words. However, the Collector said it was very pleasant, and suggested that the prize-giving should now begin, which it did. There seemed to be an enormous number of prize-winners, in every colour of the rainbow,

the Hindus, on the whole, preponderating. It looked as though those who had not acquired pretty thoroughly the knowledge that the Bat does not wear a Hat must be very few. I suppose Bengali children are very quick. To each the Mem-sahib, with a gracious smile, presented his 'Wide, Wide World' or 'Christy's Old Organ,' or whatever it might be, and the pleased recipient silently sped back to his place. There was one small girl gorgeously apparalled, with painted face and clanking anklets, among the prize-winners. She looked about four, and no doubt excelled in pot-hooks. But what might not pot-hooks lead to in the way of emancipation?

When the prizes were all worked through, the schoolmaster made a short speech, pointing out the satisfaction with which winners might bear these trophies of their learning and assiduity to their humble homes, and thanking on behalf of those present the wife of the Collector and District Magistrate for her gracious and dazzling distribution of the works in question. He then called upon his Honour for a short speech—before the meeting terminated with a rendering of "God Save the King." His Honour made a short speech. He said it was a good thing when

rich men like Babu Chundar Ram handed over money for the purposes of education, but they must remember that the test of education was the practical result it had. Everybody could not be a philosopher, but everybody could learn to be sensible. There was a difference between learning and wisdom, and the latter was better because it implied character—and so on. The speech was greeted with great applause and noddings of the head, so that every one seemed to be most harmonious, and you might have thought that East and West were agreed upon every point of education at any rate. Then the Collector rose and asked for a day's holiday in honour of his visit, just as a distinguished visitor might have done at an English school, and the schoolmaster smilingly granted it, and there was general applause, just as at home, though as a matter of fact I believe that holidays are the one thing that schoolmasters and boys mostly detest in Bengal, their assiduous habits being disturbed by interruptions of this kind. Equally I believe that the Collector only asked for the holiday because he realised this, and meant to get back on the schoolmaster for having made him listen to so many long speeches on education.

He would not allow this when I taxed him with it, but said he had asked for the holiday because it was the custom to do so.

If my interpretation was correct, and he had done it to annoy the schoolmaster, it must be confessed that the schoolmaster got back on him later. The matter hardly really enters into this account of the speech day, but I may as well mention it. It took shape some months later, when the Collector was about to leave the district. The schoolmaster sent him a parting gift, in which was enclosed the following letter. The letter, I must state, was headed

"*God Save Our District Magistrate!!*"

and ran—

"HONOURED SIR, — I beg you to accept as kindly gift in departing 5 pomegranate fruits, 5 oranges, 2 doz. walnuts, and 1 bottle hair lotion. The latter is restorative to hair, and invaluable after much toil to weak brain."

CHAPTER IX.

THE PATWARI AND THE PEACOCK.

It was late afternoon of a Bengal March, and rather warmer than it had been all day. When it is as warm as that, one is not sure whether it is cooler to sit quite still in a chair, or to get up and pant about for a little. I sat in a chair in front of a tent in the mango-grove which we had reached a few hours before in the sweat of our brows, travelling first by train and then by horse. The heat seemed to be massed and held by the trees. From their green shelter overhead invisible doves cooed, an oriole hung upside down on a branch above me, and now and again a partridge called from a piece of grass jungle not far off. That was like England. Not like England was the perpetual buzz of insect life.

"So this is what a Government estate is

like?" I said to the Collector, as he came out from his office tent. He had brought me there on one of his inspection rounds, having promised that if business could be got through in time, we should go together into a peacock jungle that lay to the south, and hunt peacocks from the back of an elephant. When he had spoken of the place as a Government estate, I had vaguely expected a park-like property with a manor-house to it and a ring fence. Instead, there stretched, outside the mango-grove, the usual endless plain, part cultivated, part wild—all brown in the sunset except for that dark and mysterious patch in the distance which was the peacock jungle.

The Collector nodded.

"It seems very jolly," I added, in case he should think I was not appreciating this particular portion of his kingdom. "Especially the partridges."

"It may seem jolly," said the Collector with a frown, "but it's in a considerable mess. I am sorry about those peafowl, but I daresay we shan't have time to go after them. It is quite clear the Patwari is a villain."

"Perhaps he is really ill," I said.

"Perhaps," said the Collector, not impressed. "I wish I knew what he has been up to for the last year or so."

I ought to explain—since the Patwari is, so to speak, the cause of this paper — that a Patwari is something between a bailiff and an estate agent, and this particular Patwari was bailiff of this particular estate. The Bengal Government has upon its hands quite a number of similar properties. It does not exactly need them or hanker after them, but when their previous owners die without an heir, or decamp without paying rates and taxes, then if nobody else will buy the places—and up-country in Bengal there seems no desperate desire to become an owner of property—the Government has to take over charge of these estates willy-nilly. And "proputty sticks." The Government officials at headquarters console themselves with the thought that after all it is an excellent thing that country officers, such as Collectors and so forth, should come into direct contact with the land and the peasants; and of course they are quite right. It is a most excellent thing. The only trouble is that when a man already has his hands full of other work, the supervision of a large number

of separate estates varying in size, and cut off from one another perhaps by thirty or forty miles of jungle roads, tends to become more of a labour than a joy. The Collector had not grumbled to me about his forty estates. He had forty. But I had gathered that the impossibility of giving them a real and proper supervision irked him considerably. Here, for example, was one of the biggest of his estates, and he was seeing it for the first time. His immediate predecessor, whose term of office in that district had been a brief one, had not visited it at all, while the Collector before him had got there just previous to his promotion to some other place, and had only had time to leave some hasty notes, saying that the rents received seemed inadequate, and it might be as well to look after the Patwari. What sort of looking after was required he left to future discoverers to decide.

We were about to become those discoverers, and with a view to discovering as much as possible during the two days the Collector had at his disposal, the date of our visit had not been announced beforehand. We had simply ridden up to the Patwari's house, before we came on to the mango-grove, and the Collector had

sent in word he would like to see the Patwari at once. Not thus is a Bengali citizen caught napping. A few minutes later a message had been sent out to his Honour—a simple pathetic message—by the mouth of the Patwari's servant, to say that by a singular fatality the Patwari had that very morning been seized with bad fever, and would be compelled to keep his bed for at least two days. Even now, alas! he lay on the couch of suffering. Instead of expressing his regrets for the trials of a fellow-labourer in the work of the district, his Honour had returned a simple but I thought hard-hearted message to the effect that as he only proposed staying in the neighbourhood two days, and must in the course of that time thoroughly inspect the whole of the estate, it would be necessary for the Patwari in the public interests, at the risk of increasing his fever, to appear in the mango-grove in one hour from that time, bringing with him all the estate books.

In one hour the Patwari had appeared, a benevolent-faced old man, looking a little injured perhaps; but cheery and anxious to help his Honour to his utmost to grasp the details of a stewardship which I felt sure, from his honest

and open manner, would prove to have been one of sterling merit. Unfortunately he had forgotten to bring the estate books. They were made up —oh yes, made up to this very week, — every trifling figure was entered in them, he assured the Collector, but in the haste of coming to pay his respects he had forgotten to bring them. It was his haste and his fevered head, one was led to suppose. The callous Collector, ignoring his frail state of health, had proceeded to cross-examine him about all sorts of estate matters which even a strong and salubrious Patwari might have found it difficult to explain outright. Result — muddled and increasingly contradictory replies from a hurt but very patient Patwari: cold wrath from a suspicious and baffled Collector. Patwari presently dismissed with two injunctions —(1) That immediately on his return to the village he send round the forgotten estate books: (2) That at an early hour next morning he again present himself at camp, so that he may personally conduct the Collector round estate and make clear many points at present highly mysterious — no amount of fever to prevent Patwari from thus presenting himself.

The books had been sent round—not, it is true,

immediately, but a few hours later, and with them had come a message saying that an uncle on his mother's side was dying in a village two miles away — would his Honour therefore excuse the Patwari's attendance next morning, as he desired, instead, to go over and soothe the deathbed of the said uncle? And now the Collector, whose reply to this appeal had been a curt negative, had come forth from going through the books, and was telling me that not only were they in a great muddle, but that the whole of the accounts for the last half-year had, he was convinced, been written in during the last half-hour, the ink being scarcely dry. Of course it was because they had not been written up that the Patwari had forgotten to bring them.

"It merely shows that he's cunning as well as rascally," said the Collector, having explained this much.

"What exactly do you suspect him of having done?" I asked.

"I can't quite make out yet what he's done," said the Collector. "The amount of money received from tenants seems to bear no relation to the amount of land rented, and any way the books are quite hazy as to what amount of land

is rented. The best part of the estate, so far as I can make out, isn't rented at all—which seems odd."

"How are you going to unravel things?" I asked.

"Ride personally over the whole of the place to-morrow," said the Collector, "and at the same time get the Sub-deputy-Collector to go round with the Kanungo and write down who exactly the tenants are and what land they rent. I really am afraid that by the time we have got that all done there'll be none left for going after those peafowl."

"Never mind," I said. "I am seeing Bengal anyway,—the shameful rapidity with which you entertain suspicions of deserving native officials —the harshness of your methods in trying to extract money for an alien Government. All this is of interest, and what I came to see."

The oppressor grinned in a careworn manner and returned to pore over the estate books. I was thankful that in that great heat I had nothing to do but lie in a chair and listen to the partridges calling.

It was rather an interesting cavalcade that started to ride over the Government estate the

next morning. Not counting the two of us, it consisted of the following. The Patwari, turbaned and slippered, in flowing robes, upon a very diminutive pony with leaning legs. The Patwari's tall and turbaned servant on foot. No increase of fever, by the way, seemed at this crisis to ravage the Patwari's ingenuous and dignified countenance, but, on the other hand, a different and strange affliction had seized him. He had become deaf — remarkably deaf. The Collecter, who had addressed him some questions before we started, had been unable to make himself audible at all to the Patwari; yet so humbly anxious was the old gentleman to hear what his Honour was saying that even the Collector had been staggered, and came to me to ask if I had any recollection of the Patwari's having seemed deaf overnight. Honestly, I could not say that I had. It did not much matter what our recollections might have been. Beyond all doubt the Patwari was exceedingly deaf now, and even loud shouts, which on a blazing hot day are exhausting to produce and trying to the temper of the producer, failed to have any effect upon him. He understood, of course, that he was being spoken to, and spoke in his turn

quickly and at length, giving copious information about the estate. But it was not the information the Collector desired, nor did his answers in any way correspond to the questions asked him. The Collector having roared himself into a hoarse fume, gave up at last; after which I saw the Patwari frequently take sideways glances of anxiety at his Honour's not too reassuring face.

Next to be enumerated in the cavalcade were our two chuprassies, mounted upon the borrowed elephant we had brought with us in case time allowed of our entering the peacock jungle. There is no need to describe them at length. One was valiant and the other was discreet, and for shikari purposes they balanced one another very nicely. Thus, if the small valiant one plunged into a crocodile-infested bog after a wounded duck, the other was pretty sure to be on the bank pointing out to him the dangers he incurred and the advisability of coming to shore at once. Besides these, there was the mahout and a heterogeneous collection of villagers, who, as usually happens in Bengal, had floated in from nowhere in particular and meant to see the day's fun. Lastly, there was the Sub-deputy-Collector and the Kanungo. The Sub-

deputy-Collector was a Bengali—a vast young man with the limbs and lurch of Dr Johnson. He wore a new solar topi, a white duck jacket, and white duck riding-breeches, but, owing either to an inability to ride or the inability of any horse to carry him, went on foot and was already perspiring heavily. This human weakness in no way detracted from the gravity and severity of his face, which suggested—or did so when he remembered to keep his mouth shut—that everything that lay before us that day depended for its success upon his judgment, which, come what might, should not fail us. He entirely disdained to glance at the Kanungo (a commonplace, shrewd-faced, little Mohametan, who rode a pony)—though they were to be colleagues for the day at any rate, and were despatched at the end of the first mile or so to go and take the names and measurements which the Collector required. I can still see the Sub-deputy-Collector puffing his chest and tightening his lips as the Collector said to him—

"Now, remember, all I want you to do is to note down the names of the tenants and the extent of their land as the Kanungo measures it.

Don't go and put down a lot of things about nothing in particular that happen to strike your fancy."

"Certainly not, your Honour, certainly not. I understand precisely. Just a few notes set out clearly. It shall be as your Honour desires," said the immense young man, striding off and swelling with the pride of his mission, with the Kanungo riding coolly in his wake.

"He's very keen," said the Collector, as we turned in the saddle to watch them going, "but he *will* make the most enormous reports about nothing at all. It's the Bengali flamboyancy. Restraint in any form is the last thing a Bengali learns. And of course he quarrels all the time with the Kanungo, because the Kanungo is a Behari and a Mohametan. I wonder whose tent that is?"

This last was in reference to a large and comfortable marquee which had been pitched a little to the right of the sandy road along which we were now riding. In this remote country it was strange to see a tent at all, and the Collector rode up to the Patwari to try and learn from him who could be camping there. He came back to inform me that the Patwari

was still deaf, but that the Patwari's servant said that it was the camp of Kari Babu.

"Who's Kari Babu?" I inquired.

"He's a local zemindar," said the Collector. "Known as a very bad lot. He oppresses his tenants more than most of them. My idea is that he's probably in collusion with the Patwari to try and cheat us in some way. It seems that he's only just arrived, nominally to do some shooting. The fact probably is that he heard that we were coming, just as the Patwari did, and hurried along too in order to watch and see if I found out anything."

The plot was thickening, though in what direction I had not the faintest idea, nor would the Collector reveal his thoughts further. For some little time we rode on silently. The sun was blazing hot with that heat that spears you in the spine, and there was no protection from it, since the country we were passing through was open, except for grass jungles now and then that grew up higher than an elephant.

Altogether I was beginning to think that the delights of a Government estate were lessening and the monotony of the plains increasing, when we came upon one of those sights which, by their

great beauty, make one forget heat and toil, and quite make one wonder how it was one could have thought the plains dull or unbeautiful. We came upon it through some of that very high grass that I have mentioned—by a zigzag track trodden first of all perhaps by pigs or leopards, but used now by the scarcely more exacting Bengal peasant. It was a great pool with waters like polished ebony. They were so smooth and bright that not only were all the tall reeds mirrored in them, but one could see flickering there even so small a thing as the shadow of a pied kingfisher. The bird itself hung in the air quivering with that sharp, quick motion that a butterfly uses when it is caught in some invisible web. Only the kingfisher was not caught, but aiming to catch some fish that swam beside its shadow. The waters were so black that though it seemed as if one must be able to look to their very bottom, one could in fact see no deeper than into a mirror. On the marge of the pool there lay some tortoise-shells—big, empty shells. Some predatory beast or man had ripped the life out of them and left them lying there for time or the creatures that came down to drink to tread back into the mud out of which they came. Between the reeds the tiniest birds fluttered up and

down, but silently. There was no noise at all by this pool, and perhaps that is why it had been given the name which one of the villagers with us told us it was called by—Dead Warriors' Tarn. There was one watcher by it as we came up—a great lemon-coloured crocodile. Probably he had found his way there in flood-time from some far stream, and been left with the recession of the waters. He must have heard us approach, for in an instant he plopped from the edge of the reeds where he was sitting into the pool, leaving a black, sparkling wake. Then we saw the thing that, for me at any rate, marked out this pool from many other not dissimilar ones that I had seen before in rides through the jungle. It was a mass of purple coot that floated together on the top of that shining sombre water, on the far side of the pool, hard by some water-lilies.

I had noted in Bengal two effects of massed colour which could not, I thought, be surpassed anywhere in the world. The first was that not uncommon one produced by a flock of green parrots suddenly, on some alarm, leaving the shelter of trees together. As they burst into the open it is as though some rock of emerald had exploded and blown into a thousand dazzling,

screaming fragments. The second was a flight of silver plover wheeling into the sun, till even that Indian sun at midday seemed—in the shadow of their wings—to grow pale and delicate as the moon,—as that moon one may see off the Cornish coast shining on pilchards as they are hauled up to the surface in the big seine. Both these sights I had seen, and thought well-nigh unsurpassable. But as I looked out across Dead Warriors' Tarn, it seemed to me that these purple coots floating on that black shining water, near the water-lilies, were still more beautiful. I do not know how anyone could have miscalled these lustrous birds purple. As well call our English kingfisher purple. Opal is nearer the colour; and opals all crowded together in that dark cave in the mountain, when the magic lamp lit them up for Aladdin, were what they looked like. And then—as something made them aware of us—they became winged opals, and whirred above the reeds, and in a moment were lost in the jungle beyond. For that moment, as one's eyes followed the amazing iridescence, the name—Dead Warriors' Tarn—seemed not quite suited to the pool. Jewels have been found that were buried with dead warriors, but never living jewels. I tried to find out through

the Collector if there was any legend connected with the pool, but the villagers' store of information had given out. It was called Dead Warriors' Tarn—that was all he knew; nor do I suppose that the average English agricultural labourer who could tell one, say, that a given field was called The Outpost or Poison Mead, would be able to go much further in clearing up origins. The name and the pool might alike be old or new. Mostly we think of things in India as very old, but the illusion of age is also very easily created there. A river that seems to have flowed in its channel for a thousand years is known to have arrived perhaps yesterday; and where a desert of sand is seen to-day, yesterday and it may be for a thousand years before a river ran through ploughed land.

We rode on from here along more plain land, only stopping at one or two little villages where the Collector thought he might have a chance of gathering information from the peasants. He questioned many of them, but though there was nothing to suggest that they were giving preconcerted answers, I judged from his face that he was not finding out what he wanted. Altogether, we were, I think, a little cast down by the time we halted for lunch outside another village which

seemed to bound the estate on the west. Here, however, we were cheered a little by a communication which reached us from the Sub-deputy-Collector. It was brought by a small towsel-headed boy,—nine pages of foolscap paper closely written in pencil, with marginal and foot notes added at random, and the Collector, after a glance at it, handed it to me.

"You heard me tell him that I wanted nothing but the names of tenants and the extent of their land," he said with a groan. "Look at that and realise the aid we sometimes receive from our assistants!"

It certainly was a curious document, and I wish now that I had kept possession of it, for the best bits I cannot remember. It took a diary form, and was to this effect—

"9.3 A.M. Have got to this, the first village. The Kanungo is not yet arrived. This seems strange, since he has pony, and I not.

"9.10 A.M. Very hot in this village. Still the Kanungo not arrived. I have set myself on ground and summoned villagers to come about me and tell me what size of village, what number of people, diseases, deaths, &c. I look in vain for Kanungo.

"9.19 A.M. At last I espy pony in distance, and presently Kanungo arrive, very leisured. I say to him

I am here from 9.3 o'clock A.M. What would his Honour say if he knew that you have thus delayed yourself? Insolent reply of Kanungo, by which, however, I disdain to be drawn in quarrel. Calmly I say to him to use chains at once as directed by his master the Collector and District Magistrate.

"10.4 A.M. I further question the villagers, and learn that a cow has been taken not long since into the jungle. Chota bagh is suspected by leading inhabitants. I think they are poor people, and not much tillage done. Names as follows of those with whom I have spoken, but many absent in fields, others sick, &c.

"10.13 A.M. What is Kanungo doing? This subordinate official not visible from where I stand cross-examining older inhabitants on question relating to sanitary precautions, water-supplies, depth of well, social relations with surrounding villages, query intermarriage, and other matters affecting rural amenities. I think it likely that he sits in shade of peepul trees, while others perform assiduous duties. Is this the way, I ask, to secure flattering commendations of his Honour the District Magistrate, only reserved for those showing keenness and perseverance throughout all transactions committed and guaranteed to their charge? Perhaps Kanungo will regret later contemptuous rejection of advices offered in friendly spirit.

"10.43 A.M. Doves not uncommon on trees and nests of wild bee observed sporadically. Doubtless honey singularly fortuitous and acceptable diet in the event of failure as per annum of winter crop. I consider much of land suitable for buffalo, goat, &c.

"10.59 A.M. Information this moment received from inadequately clothed urchin (see Government regulations *re* native dress) that Kanungo has already moved on to next village. Query work here properly done by said official?"

As I have mentioned, there were nine foolscap pages of this, all annotated in the fullest manner. Thus, "Others sick" would have a footnote, giving several names of diseases as suspected by, or symptoms as related to, the indefatigable Sub-deputy-Collector. Against "Sanitary precautions" the single word "None" was to be in the margin. "Depth of well" had been stated in several different ways—*e.g.*, according to the belief of the villagers, according to the guess of the Sub-deputy-Collector after dropping stone in, according to actual measurements made with rope, which did not, however, reach to the bottom. His Honour was at liberty to take his choice from this mass of evidence or not bother about it, as he pleased.

"It is very interesting," I said, handing the manuscript back. "Do you often get reports like that?"

"Fairly often," said the Collector. "At present the Sub-deputy-Collector is slowly learning to be

methodical—only, his buoyancy gets the better of him. 'Of course, much of it is quite ingenious. Many of the officials wouldn't have noticed the wild bees or the suitability of the land for buffaloes; nor would it have occurred to them, in their wildest dreams, to have gone into the question of inter-marriage. Still, when one has to read reams of that——"

"Quite so," I said. "Does the Kanungo send in a report too?"

"Oh, he'll probably just put down the figures I asked for, and not bother about anything else."

"Not even the Sub-deputy-Collector's reproaches?"

"Not he," said the Collector.

A few minutes later we were in the saddle again. We had, before resting for lunch, traversed a good half of the Government estate without coming upon what appeared—according to the estate books—to be the best land, from an agricultural point of view, upon the property; and it was on finding this land that the Collector was now bent. The Patwari, re-summoned to his presence, appeared to be deprived not only of the use of his hearing but also of the use of his under-

standing. The Collector would point on an old map of the estate he had with him to the land he desired to inspect, and then by gesticulations desire the Patwari to lead us to it. The Patwari would either smile amiably and shake his head, or he would wave his hand in some clearly impossible direction. In the end the Collector decided that he would have to find the place he wanted for himself, the Patwari accompanying but not guiding. I secretly applauded this resolution, because the land the Collector wanted to find seemed to lie pretty close to the peacock jungle, and I thought there might be a chance of entering it after all. I really think, upon looking back, that the Patwari, seeing the Collector's decision, might have had the decency to know that he was done for, and therefore it was not worth while to delay us further. (He must have felt that he was a lost soul.) But not he. For the rest of that afternoon he delayed things as much as he could. First of all, it appeared that during lunch-time his pony had been sent off home—for reasons not explained. We were left to infer—from the mere fact—that it would not be decent to expect the Patwari on foot to accompany us further. The Collector failed to

make that decent inference, and invited the Patwari not only to step out on foot but to step out smartly. With the sigh of a martyr the Patwari started, but at what a pace! Certainly it was hot, but mutes at funerals go quicker than the Patwari went. He went so slowly and tailed off so much, that twice, at least, the cavalcade had to stop altogether and wait for him lest he should turn off into some piece of jungle and disappear. After the third stop the Collector gave him the post of honour in the van, where—such was his tottering gait, such his need to stop at every uninviting pool to lave his head and drink—he moved me to compassion. I am afraid my compassion was not what he wanted. It was the Collector's that he was playing for in vain. For the truth is, that when in the end we came to that good land we were in search of, we found that—contrary to the statements in the Patwari's books as filled in by himself — it supported quite a large number of tenants. And they, alas for the Patwari! were traitors, and explained matters fully to the Collector. It seemed that this land, which Government supposed itself to be letting at something like half a rupee per

biga, was actually being let to them at three rupees; and this rent they were paying, not to Government at all, but to Kari Babu. That desperate old villain, the Patwari, was in the meanwhile drawing a double salary, — one for looking after the estate for Government, the other for allowing the zemindar to let to these peasants—as though it were his own property, and at six times the proper price—the best land on the Government estate. I believe that later the Patwari brought up the plea that this ingenious arrangement was of recent date, and had not brought in much to him; but on the other hand the Collector found out that, before the zemindar had come in as patron, the Patwari had rented this rich land to his own brother for grazing purposes at a nominal cost, on condition that the brother kept the Patwari's buffaloes upon it.

The main facts were cleared up in a very few minutes, after which the Collector summoned the tenants about him in a circle, and, with the Patwari at his right hand, explained shortly and hotly the rights of the case, and the incredible wrongs wrought by the Patwari and the Babu. Even during this painful har-

angue, while his Izzet—or reputation—in that region was being made of no account, the Patwari, with a fortitude worthy of a better man, retained his semblance of deafness, and bent forward with a humbly approving smile, as though the Collector were speaking his own thoughts, only with a greater eloquence. But something — probably the thought that if the Collector became too violent he would really impress these peasants with the belief that they need no longer, after his Honour's departure, go on paying himself or the Babu the Government rent, as they had done before—did at one point shake him. Just for a moment he lost his deafness and burst into respectful protest against the Collector's last sentence. I fancy the epithets used by the Collector to describe his conduct were considered needlessly unkind. It was the Collector's chance, and he took it. The words spoken by the Patwari did not reach his ears, and in the peroration with which he wound up his account of the Patwari's stewardship no word that could be construed into appreciation, or even tender-heartedness, was heard. I think the Patwari would gladly have sold what remained of his Izzet for an anna. I think, too,

he would willingly have had his pony there to bear him home from a scene which had undeniably shaken him.

Justice was done, and there was still half an hour before dusk would fall. And the peacock jungle was very close. I pointed this out to the Collector, and since there was no chance of catching the Babu that day and explaining to him also that ingenuity does not excuse crime, we decided to have a try for the peafowl. A very few minutes later we were swaying along, guns in hand, on the pad of our elephant. I remember that we crossed into the jungle by a slimy river, which reminded me of nothing so much as the Regent's Park Canal where it runs oozily, hard by the Zoo—a river, moreover, which very nearly avenged the Patwari by swallowing us up. The mahout could not find a ford, and urged the elephant down into a grey odorous water that instantly began to close over him. We could hear the mud gulp under his feet, and had to draw our legs up out of the filthy stuff that lapped about his shoulders. For a second or two he could not make up his mind whether to sink or stir; then the great muscles in his forelegs swelled out at the water, and

somehow or other he heaved us through the slime. A short plunge up the opposite bank and we had entered the jungle. It was very still, but unlike the mango-grove in this, that in spite of the great heat of the day it was already cool in the sunset, perhaps because it was so heavily wooded. Ordinarily, I believe, peafowl ought to be looked for in a grass jungle, which also gives the best chance of shooting them. They are intensely wary birds—poor starters if you are anywhere near them when they begin to start, but sufficiently aware of this failing of theirs to start as a rule in very good time. It looked as if the wooded jungle we were in were far from being an ideal place for pursuing these birds, but, sport or not, it was worth seeing for its own sake. There was a wonderful cathedral light through it. We saw a green pigeon — sitting solitary in a great red-blossoming cotton-tree—which had all the colours of a bird in a stained-glass window. A little later, again, there stood out ahead of us another big tree whose boughs were yet bare from the winter, but packed with egrets so that it seemed to have burst into white blossom in the dim light. As we went on, the jungle opened out into glades that held tangles

of dog-rose and wild plum, and grassy hollows, and little shallow meres where water-birds were beginning to sleep.

And the Collector began to say that it was no good going further. Already it was far too late for the peafowl. We shouldn't be able to see them soon if we heard any, and we hadn't heard any yet; after which, silently condemning the Patwari, we turned the elephant. As we turned, there came from the copse we had been about to enter a mocking and hideous sound—just the sort of sound the Patwari, if he had lived in that jungle, a wizard and diviner of thoughts, would have given vent to at just that moment. An immense sustained bray, followed by a flapping noise that grew fainter and fainter as the flapper receded into the jungle. It was the peacock!

CHAPTER X.

A TRAMP THROUGH THE JUNGLE.

It was in returning from camp that I took that solitary tramp which was so much shorter in point of fact than I intended it to be, so much longer in point of exertion. I had decided to take a long walk for some time past. There is nothing like a walk for getting a connected and detailed idea of the kind of country one is in, or for realising in a country like this some of the feelings of the man who lives there. The sun becomes a familiar thing instead of a stranger only admitted to one's presence at ceremonial times for fear he should become intrusive and overwhelming. One gets the feel of the road under foot; one sees the slow changes of the soil; one comes upon the people not merely at their daily work, but at their daily rest. All these things I wanted to do. But their fulfilment necessitated an all day

walk, and so far I had not walked an hour together in Bengal. The sun was very hot, and I hung back from a walk day after day. In the end I was spurred into it by a feeling of rivalry. The Civil Surgeon was the cause.

A little time before, when our tents were pitched side by side in the same dak bungalow compound, Clothilde had found him sitting outside his tent in the sun, and had suggested that, our tent being in the shade, he should bring his chair across and join us till breakfast was ready. He said that he would be delighted, clapped his hands, and directed the instantly appearing bearer to transfer his chair from his tent to ours, the distance being about five yards. Clothilde was ironical in her apology for having suggested that he should himself bring his chair.

"I forgot I was in India," she said, "and that I ought to have had your chair carried that enormous distance. Are you sure you can walk it?"

The Doctor grinned.

"One does get lazy," he said, "in that way. It's a bad habit, of course. I can manage to walk to your tent, thank you. But really one does get out of the way of walking."

"Why shouldn't English people ever walk in India?" asked Clothilde.

"I incline to think they should," said the Doctor, "sometimes. I intend to reform from this moment."

He wrote a note two days afterwards simply to announce that he had walked seven miles, and next time we met him he announced to Clothilde almost solemnly—

"Yesterday I walked twenty miles. What do you think of that?"

Clothilde said it was excellent, and I instantly decided that if the doctor, who had been years in India, could suddenly walk twenty miles without being any the worse for it, I, who had only been there a few months, could easily do the forty-four miles that separated our present camp from the station. There was one point I ought to have cross-examined the doctor upon, and that was how he managed for drink. I found out long afterwards that he had broken all the laws of tramping, and shown his own sagacity, by taking a man with him to carry refreshments. I never thought of that point at the time, and considered myself amply provident to take with me a pint flask of whisky and soda ready mixed and some

sandwiches. Fool, in that I did not remember that man is not a camel, whereas Bengal, for all practical purposes, is undoubtedly a desert. I felt assured I should have no difficulty in finding the road. It ran for the most part through a jungly country. Not so long before the Collector had shot a leopard in it only a hundred yards from the highway. But it was a recognisable road, and there were not so many of these that I should be likely to wander off it.

John, when I communicated my intention to him, remonstrated at some length. He pointed out that I could go back by horse, by tonga, by elephant, and even by "terain"—any of which methods were preferable to going on one's own legs. I fancy now that he thought he was going to be the man who was to carry the refreshments, and when he realised that with well-nigh incredible imbecility I meant to travel by myself he resigned himself to my probable fate. Anyhow he gave me a chota haziri of tea and a banana at six o'clock the next morning, and allowed me to start at half past six through a thick white mist that was almost cold. Nobody in the village was about, for the Bengali adapts himself to his climate, and until the sun has

dried up the dews of early morning, he will not go out and risk catching fever. Therefore, as I marched through the straggling street of mud huts thatched with grass, everything was silent, and the only dust that rose was the dust that I myself kicked up. A mile outside the village I sat down to take the dust out of my boots, and also to have a drink. It was singular how the dust insinuated itself into one's boots and one's throat. I had been in the East some months now, but never before had I quite realised the power of the dust. In England we do not know what dust is—not even since the advent of the motor-car. "Dust thou art," "His enemies shall lick the dust," "eating dust," "shaking the dust from off one's feet"—these had seemed mere literary phrases to me. An hour on that road sufficed to show me they were truest realism, and to give me a new respect for dust. I had shaken it from off my feet twice, had licked and eaten quantities of it, could feel myself dust and little more from head to foot. Yet I had scarcely more than started the walk, and was only just beginning to meet the ordinary traffic of the road, men on foot and on ponies, men driving bullock-carts, and men driving cattle

—the most potent dust-stirrers of all. I came out of a cloud half a mile long, caused by one of these droves, to find another drink necessary and also to find that there was very little of it left. I decided to husband what there was left, and to try if walking a little faster would answer the purposes of a drink.

The road was shaded with trees, and ran through an agricultural country that was at this part mostly scorched stubble that lay a little below the road level. Here and there were patches of grey mud, which marked the places where ponds had been earlier in the year. There was no one at work in the fields, which looked, in consequence, rather desolate. Rain would have made all the difference to them. This desolate and neglected air, which a dry season always gives to this sort of countryside, is increased by the untidy aspect which the sides of a Bengal road always wear. That is due to the unsuitable method of keeping them. The road menders, who are employed to shovel earth on to the roadways, take it from the land immediately at the side of the road, without any method except what comes from being paid at so much per square foot. Survey men go round at intervals and measure the spaces

which have been dug the same season, or those they think have been dug the same season, the road menders not being averse now and then from enlarging old diggings in order to give them a new appearance, and thus earn good rupees at a minimum cost of labour. The net result of all this is that the sides of a Bengal highway present the appearance of having been fitted out with all shapes and sizes of shallow graves. Properly supervised, the digging would be continuous, thus forming a regular and useful ditch instead of a series of irregular and unpicturesque holes.

Having in my mind's eye presented the local authority with this idea free of charge, I felt entitled to finish my flask, which I did; thereafter walking on steadily until I saw, a little off the road, the chimneys of a bungalow half buried in sand. There was a garden all round it, also silted up. Curiosity impelled me to go and inspect it, and I found that it was a deserted indigo factory. The machinery at the back was broken and rusted, and the vats were full of sand, which had drifted up also on to the verandah of the bungalow and through the broken shutters into the house. The garden still flourished in a rank way. Mangoes were in blossom, and the

jack fruits already formed. There was a high bank on which cannas grew. Some heavy flood had driven the sand down upon this place and finished what was perhaps already a dying industry. I did not stay long, but walked on for two or three miles in an increasing heat and with an increasing thirst; and then sat down under a peepul tree by the roadside and took out my watch. It was eleven o'clock; and, calculating from the last mile post, I had walked nearly eighteen miles and was consumed with a raging thirst. It appeared to me that the difficulties in the way of completing my journey were greater than I had thought, and it seemed high time to reckon up the chances. The facts presented themselves in a distinctly unfavourable light. In four and a half of the coolest hours of the day I had walked some eighteen miles, got exceedingly hot, and consumed all the liquid I could hope for until I reached the station twenty-six miles distant. It was still early, however, and would not be dark until seven, so that, though I should certainly lose myself if I went on walking after dark, I still had eight hours of daylight in which to do twenty-six miles. It sounds ample time for anyone who can walk at all. I was not in any

way exhausted, and my feet—though walking on a fine dust that penetrated one's socks was beginning to make them painful — would probably last the distance. But already I had a thirst such as I had hardly deemed possible in this world. It was so violent that I felt that if I walked on for another hour or two, in the heat, it would pass all contemplation. Supposing I did do another few miles, they would count as nothing against the thirst that would then consume me.

I put aside for a moment the question of walking on straight away, and considered that of resting where I was until the cool of the afternoon—say, till three o'clock. It would still be hot then, but becoming cool. If I lay at full length under the peepul till then, I might endure my thirst. It would be an unpleasant experience, but it could be endured. The point was—how much better off should I be? At three o'clock I should still be as far from water as ever, and, with my morally vanquished thirst ready to renew the struggle at any moment, faced with the necessity of accomplishing twenty-six miles in four hours. Usually on a walk I am singularly hopeful and can, in theory, do five miles an hour steadily for hours. In practice the pace may be reduced to four miles

or even less; but then on an ordinary walk it doesn't matter. I merely rearrange my plans. Here I could not risk rearranging them. If I could have spoken Bengali, or if I had possessed the reckless spirit of an explorer, it would have been different. In the first case I could have stopped at the next village and required of the first villager I met to boil water for me, which when cool would be fit to drink. In the second case, I should heedlessly have swallowed the water—which by signs I should make the same villager see that I wanted—without caring whether it were taken from the nearest ditch or washing pool, and never thinking of its germs of cholera or typhoid. But I have confessed that I have not the spirit of a pioneer, and the prospect of getting even dysentery from such a casual draught struck me as singularly unpleasant. Yet it was certain that I could not wait where I was until the afternoon and reach the station before dark. It was almost equally certain that if I got belated and lost I should not be able to persuade or commandeer a villager to guide me the rest of the way. Everybody knows how much the earlier travellers were helped on their way by the language of gesture; but everybody also knows

who has ever tried how little that language conveys to the more modern savage. I could foresee the sort of scene—myself with parched throat shouting hoarsely and gesticulating wildly to a Bengali peasant, and him, after a few preliminaries of exasperating stupidity, pretending to be deaf or dumb or taken with a fever—anything to get rid of a sahib probably mad and undoubtedly a nuisance.

There remained two lines of action open to me. One was to wait for the cool of the afternoon and then to return to where I had started from. This would give me only eighteen miles to do instead of twenty-six, and I should find a dak bungalow at the end and perhaps an English friend. The walk would be feasible before dark. Only thirst had not altogether destroyed my pride. I thought of John. John had from the first regarded me as mad to take the walk. I had rather jauntily given John to understand that the walk would be nothing—nothing whatever. If I went back to my starting-point John would know that I had failed. And I did not care to face John possessed of that knowledge. He would be as respectful as ever. If he referred to the matter it would be delicately, though his

imperfect English would make delicacy difficult. That would not matter. It was his face that would worry me. Meek as it looked, it could be an expressive face, and I knew that I should see expressions upon it such as would irritate me intensely. I could not return. . . .

The alternative was to make for the nearest railway station and take the train from there. Such a solution sounds simple. Where—it might be asked,—if I had only to walk from a road to a railway station, did the jungle come in? It came in at precisely this point when I decided that the railway station was the place for me. For it lay between me and the railway station, and I could see the jungle quite plainly though I could not see the railway station, nor did I know where the latter was. All that I did know about it was that it must be somewhere to the south of the road. On a map the evening before I had seen the little branch line marked, and had not thought twice about it, or about bringing the map. All I could remember now was that its first station had struck me as being about half way between my starting-point and my goal, and that the line ran a few miles (but whether as few as two or as many as ten I had

not the least idea) south of the road. Pardon, I remembered a third thing in connection with it, and that was that a train went through in the morning. Somebody had said something about it. Could that something have been that the train started at eleven o'clock? If so, it would reach the somewhere-about-half-way station at noon. If I could catch the train my troubles were at an end.

I started at once, sand in my boots, dust in my throat, doubts in my head—doubts as to whether that railway station were ahead of me or behind, as to what time the train really reached it, as to how many miles intervened between the road I was on and whatever part of the line I should happen to strike. These doubts recapitulated themselves *ad nauseam* as I went, crossing a hot stretch of stubble to get at the jungle that lay beyond. It was a grass jungle as I was glad to see, and not very high grass at that, so that I could look into it for some distance. Some jungles are absolutely impassable if you do not know the track, but this was not so. Yet on its very edge I had cause to dislike it. A pig appeared. Now a domesticated pig is a harmless animal enough, and so is a wild pig under certain

circumstances. Hitherto I had mostly seen wild pigs from the back of an elephant. They had bolted at a great pace. But I was not on an elephant now, and anecdotes occurred to me—anecdotes which proved how unpleasant an animal the wild pig of Bengal can be. It is indeed the only one—with the exception of the man-eating tiger—that will attack a human being on sight and without molestation, and it is one of the few that will not abandon its victim till it has chewed him thoroughly all over. The pig's victim under these circumstances is unrecognisable, and for a moment or two I mentally gazed at my unrecognisable body as it would be when the pig I was looking at—the pig who was scrutinising me—should have departed satisfied. I glanced about for a tree which if I were menaced I could climb, but there was no tree; only grass and stubble. Then I looked for the pig's tail. I had read somewhere that the only difference between the wild and domestic pig of Bengal is that the former carries his tail straight whereas the latter curls it. If this pig's tail was curled, all was still well. The pig had his head to me and I could not see his tail. So I stood and he stood for a couple of minutes, each regarding the other

suspiciously, and then with a slight snort he turned his back on me and plunged into the grass. The tail that vanished with him seemed curly. Still I preferred to enter the jungle by another route, some distance to the right, and was thankful that no more pigs presented themselves to my view. The commoner creatures of the jungle did. It would be difficult to go through a piece of jungle in this part without seeing most of them. Mongooses, long and grey, peeped out and crept silently back; jackals pricked up their ears and sneaked off; a couple of jungle fowls whizzed out, and a hare startled itself and me by crossing suddenly just ahead of me. And then, as I was beginning to feel that pigs, considering their numbers in the district, must by all the laws of rotation be showing again shortly, I came out of the jungle and on to the railway line. I was very glad of that. I had had enough of it though. It had not been an extensive jungle. Pulling out my watch I found the time to be 11.50, so that I had been in the grass less than an hour, but it had been an uncomfortable jungle, and I was glad to be out of it. Once on the line, I decided, after a glance either way, to go forward rather than back;

and I started to run. Sleepers do not form a good track for anything but trains, and I stopped running at the end of a few minutes and began to have the feeling that the station probably lay the other way, and that in any case the train had passed long since, and that in any further case it did not matter now if I walked quickly or not. For, if the train had passed it did not much matter what I did; and if it had not passed, I vowed that it should not do so without picking me up. Again I was in luck, for, having ceased to care where the station was, I came upon it round a curve of the line some half mile farther on, and walking straight into the booking-office discovered from the Babu there that the train was not due for another half hour. So restored was I by this news that I felt I could have walked on for another hour without a drink; but I went and sat down on the edge of the station-well instead. I could look at the water in it, even if I could not drink it.

It was a very tiny station, consisting of a single platform, the well—a deep well with a stone rim to it,—a bench and a booking office. It appeared that it was a depot for jute, which was extensively grown in the neighbourhood. Great bales of the

stuff were lying in a shed the other side of the line, and half a dozen coolies were leisurely shifting it from the shed to the platform. It was going on by my train, as possibly were the half dozen men who occupied the station bench,—possibly, because stations now in Bengal are favourite lounging places, and in any case natives sometimes assemble there a day before their train goes. Time in Bengal has not the value we place upon it; whereas to be at the station is a pleasant thing. There are other passengers waiting, to exchange news with, and every few hours when a train comes in there is that bustle which a true Bengali loves to watch but not to take part in. In the meantime, the sun is there as everywhere else, making life in the open feasible. It is as easy to fill the lota—the little brass pot that every Bengali carries—at the station well as at any other; and if rice has to be cooked, it can be cooked on any land adjoining, since a handful of charcoal and a hole in the ground is all that is required. Sleep can be had equally easily. Any square foot of earth is bed enough for the Bengali, and for ablutions he can go to the nearest tank. Children love to come and play on the platform as in England, only they play far more gravely and are less burdened with

clothes. Three came while I was there—a small maiden of perhaps nine years—slim and graceful in a sari of the most vivid emerald green—accompanied by two small boys. The smaller of the two reached just up to his sister's lap. This was convenient, because in her lap, daintily held up, she had a mess of rice into which the small boys could stick their brown greasy paws till they had kneaded a portion into a round slab suitable to being rammed into their mouths. They swelled visibly during the half hour I sat on the edge of the well—their waists did, I mean—and their eyes seemed to grow larger too. Perhaps they had never seen so dusty a Sahib before.

The train arrived at last and I found a planter in it who gave me a drink, and so I arrived safely at the city, whence I had only a two miles walk to the Collector's bungalow. I did not pretend that I had walked the whole distance—not even to John,—but rather allowed the twenty miles was really almost enough for a walk in Bengal, if one was not in training, though the twenty miles had been most enjoyable. John accepted this statement with reserve, and I am ready to go further now and admit that twenty miles is almost more than enough if the drinks run out, for there is no

means of obtaining water that is safe to drink in that part of Bengal. Some day twenty miles will be the mere nothing I had tried to persuade John they were, but that will only be when the Bengali peasant has learnt that boiled water is a necessity for a man who desires to live his natural span, and that tea—the tea that is grown almost next door to him—is the most economic drink in the world.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MEET—AND THE PARTING.

ALL pleasant things come to an end—in accordance with which truism Clothilde and I found ourselves, not long after my walk back to the station, within a too easily measurable distance of leaving Bengal. Several novel and interesting experiences still awaited us, but the chronicle of them all cannot be told. I would like, however, to say a few words about the archery match which the Collector got up at a village we passed through during one of our last rides. It was an impromptu affair, and proved—if it proved anything—the old truth that "the best laid plans of mice and men gang aft agley." Particularly in Bengal. A few months previously the English Superintendent of Police for the district had hit on what seemed at the time the exceedingly well laid plan of arming the

chokidars—these being the village watchmen who act the part of rural police—with bows and arrows, in order that they might, thus armed, more easily intimidate and keep in check the very bold dacoits who were becoming a pest in the north-western portion of the district. Before this, the chokidars had gone unarmed, save with staves, which seemed hardly to count against a determined dacoit. What used to happen was either that the dacoits fled before the chokidars got near enough to apply their staves to their backs, or—far more often—that the dacoits stood firm, and having possessed themselves of the chokidars' staves, applied them to the backs of the chokidars. A change seemed needed, and the bows and arrows, without being necessarily lethal weapons, offered a chance, the Superintendent thought, of levelling things up. They could be used by the chokidars from a safe distance, timid chokidars even firing as they retreated like the Parthians of old; or—and this was what the Superintendent considered the real value of the new arm—they need not be used at all, the mere knowledge that the chokidars carried them, and might at a pinch use them, being sufficient to keep the dacoits in check. We had several times taken notice of the newly armed

chokidars, who looked very neat and warlike, with their short bent bow in one hand and a quiver full of arrows on their back; and, though dacoities had by no means ceased since their introduction, the Collector was perfectly ready to believe that they served a useful purpose. It was with a view to giving the men a pride in their weapons, and at the same time an official acknowledgment of the novelty, that he instituted the archery match at this village. The village had a police station in it, and the day we were there some thirty chokidars had come in to answer the roll-call and make their usual fortnightly reports. They were informed than an archery competition was about to be held, and that the man most successful in shooting two rounds against a mark, which would be presently set up in the police compound, would receive a prize in rupees from his Honour the District Magistrate.

The Bengali sub-inspector who was in charge of the station made this announcement on the Collector's behalf, and, though one of the large heavy sort that suffer much from the heat, supervised, with the greatest zeal, the setting up of the seven-foot stout-stemmed banana-stump which was to serve as the mark. In height the stump ex-

ceeded a genuine dacoit, and it really was not very much thinner. The competitors were to shoot from a spot twelve paces distant. Neither the Collector nor I were toxiphilists, but what with hazy recollections of the achievements of Locksley in Ivanhoe, and an intuitive perception that the distance between the mark and the marksmen would be brief even for a pea-shooter, we unanimously demurred to the twelve paces, pointing out to the sub-inspector that shooting over such a short space would make the competition nugatory, every marksman being morally certain to hit the banana tree every time. The sub-inspector, however, shook his head doubtfully, and having excused himself while he went across to consult the group of chokidars, came back to say that with his Honour's permission the men would prefer not to shoot over a longer range, some of them not having had much practice lately with their weapons. "Very well," said the Collector, "they know best what they can do. I should have thought they would all be winners at that distance."

"Some of them are worse than others," said the sub-inspector shrewdly.

"Right, let them begin," answered the Collector,

whereupon the sub-inspector called across to the chokidars that they should proceed in order—each man shooting his two arrows at the banana tree and then making way for the next. Anything less approaching enthusiasm for a match could hardly have been shown. Indeed, a distinct gloom seemed to have fallen upon the thirty chokidars, and the first candidate who took up his position did so with obvious reluctance and almost under compulsion. Even when he had taken it up, he passed quite a little time putting his first arrow to the string, and during that time I noticed that the other chokidars withdrew some way behind him as though to give him every fair chance. We had stationed ourselves half-way between the firing ground and the target, but a good bit to the right, so that we could see clearly, yet not by any probability be within range of stray arrows. The sub-inspector was with us; only with proper respect he had stationed himself slightly in our rear. I saw, as soon as the first chokidar had fired, that the sub-inspector's respect was not untempered with prudence. That preliminary arrow, which had taken so long in fitting, buzzed, as soon as the chokidar let go the string, slowly into the air,

turning somersaults as it went, and fell point downwards in the grass at some fifteen paces from the archer, and at right angles to the correct line of fire. His second arrow, which in an access of nervousness, it seemed, he managed to fit and discharge in one and the same movement, whizzed straight into the air above his head, and would have transfixed him as it returned point downwards save that he gave a sudden backward leap that carried him out of the zone of danger. "Good heavens," said the Collector, and the sub-inspector called out something anxious in Bengali which I did not understand. The group of chokidars had opened to receive the discomfited candidate, and another was coming nervously forward according to instructions.

"Stop him!" called the Collector, and the sub-inspector held up his hand to signify to the new-comer that he was to pause a moment. "Now then, sub-inspector, is this man safer than the last?"

"I think so, your Honour," said the sub-inspector hoarsely.

"Are you sure?" demanded the Collector.

"I have said to him to come," said the sub-inspector, "because he have a Santhal bow,

which is better bow than others. I think him to shoot more straight."

The possession of a Santhal bow certainly appeared to improve the archery, for this competitor's arrows maintained a fairly straight and even flight, so far as they went, which was some seven and eight paces respectively. He retired amid applause from us, and was followed by half-a-dozen not inferior marksmen, one of whom actually fixed the point of his first arrow in the banana stump — though his second was pretty wide, while another got his first shaft broadside across it, and his second very neatly at its foot. Both these men were, it appeared, moderately proud possessors of Santhal bows, but the archers that followed were not, and the knowledge that they were handicapped with home-made weapons affected not only their shooting but their nerves. It was hardly a question with them of hitting — or even of aiming at the target: all that they sought to do was to discharge their arrows from their bows with the least possible risk to their own persons. As a result the arrows flew in all sorts of unexpected directions. One dashed the enormous distance of forty yards and almost transfixed our

syce, who was watching from what he considered an absolutely safe spot. Another went straight from the bow-string into the ground, between the two bare feet of the chókidar. Rectangular shots were frequent, and so were skyward ones. But the most surprising and perilous of all was one in which the arrow sped backward from the string over the archer's shoulder and between a row of bobbing heads that were all literally missed by hairsbreadths. I cannot think now how this shot was accomplished. I remember seeing the man fiddling with the string of his bow in a timid way, but the actual discharge was an instantaneous affair, and nobody realised the portent until it was all over. Though it is not good to show fear before a Bengali even if you feel it, the Collector and I felt justified in shifting our ground several paces farther to the right, and I would very gladly have had the portly sub-inspector in front of me. However, in the end, the thirty shot off their arrows without loss of life; and then the only two who had touched the banana stump shot off the tie, when one of them managed to hit it again (I believe he shut both eyes), and so won the Collector's prize. After that, we examined the

bows and arrows. Few of them seemed constructed to afford first-class shooting. The Santhal bows had some little spring to them, and I hit the banana tree myself with a trial shot from one of them. Still, I am bound to confess that I also picked out what looked, to a tyro in the sport, the only possible arrow, and I did not risk my reputation with a second shot. The rest of the arrows were an extraordinary assortment, some with one feather to them, some with half a feather, some with none. They seemed to have been slept on and used as hoes and cattle goads, and many of them curved more than the bows, which were just sticks with strings to them. The chokidars watched our examination of their weapons with a gloomy expectancy as though they hoped against hope that the Collector might put an end to their trials by ordering the destruction of weapons so repugnant to their owners. The Collector admitted that he wasn't at all sure that they wouldn't be happier without them.

"The only question is," he went on, "do the wretched things have any effect upon the dacoits?"

"Well," I said, "the dacoits can't of course

suppose that the chokidars could ever hit them if they aimed at them—not at least if they've ever seen a chokidar firing. On the other hand, they might be afraid of arrows shot casually into the dark."

"What I'm afraid of," said the Collector, "is that the chokidars will become so fearful of shooting their own feet or heads off that their nerves will go to pieces, and the dacoits will realise it. However, I suppose they will have to give the bows a good trial."

He therefore delivered a short speech, urging all chokidars to get hold of Santhal bows and feathered arrows, and to practise with them at intervals. The match had shown, he said, that under these conditions the chokidar had every chance of hitting an object of some magnitude at twelve paces, and if dacoits realised that all chokidars were archers up to this standard, they would undoubtedly grow to fear them. But this end could only be accomplished if the chokidars persevered, and at the same time bore in mind that the person who had to fear an arrow was not the good man aiming it but the bad man at whom it was aimed.

The chokidars listened attentively, but went

off without the gloom having perceptibly lifted from their faces.

It was the very next day that race week began in the station. Most Bengal stations have their race meets, and if some of the ancient grandeur has departed from them, and old Anglo-Indians shake their heads to think how little the present generation knows of those good old days, at least a fair proportion of the spirit survives. Meets were instituted originally for rallying the Europeans of a district once or twice a-year, and still, when a meet is announced, planters come in from the outlying parts, and guests are invited even from such remote places as Calcutta, and tents are put up in the compounds to receive them, and there are balls and sports and tournaments and cricket matches and hunting and polo and racing pressing one on top of the other during seven days of crowded existence. Our week opened with a cricket match — Englishmen *v.* Bengalis — on an improvised pitch under a roasting sun. The Bengalis played with bare feet and legs—a fact that could not at first but trouble a swift bowler with a soft heart! Not that there was any real need to be troubled. The balls got up so much that the batsmen were

absolutely safe to the waist anyhow, and it was the remainder of the Bengalis' persons—and ours —that needed padding. We beat them, one or two bats of forty years ago remembering their ancient prowess at the psychological moment and giving the Bengalis in the long field something to scamper for. I found fielding with the sun in my back the deadly thing, but one is wrought up to a high pitch of endurance during race week, and having been point for the greater part of the day, I found no difficulty in dancing as a lama at a fancy dress ball for most of the night and early morning. At 5.30 A.M. the more ardent spirits went out to hunt the jackal, but hounds, which lacked training, were at fault throughout, and the only real sport that was obtained was when they got upon the scent of a dhobie's donkey. This, after giving an excellent run, turned on his pursuers with teeth and forefeet and got rather the better of his encounter with the pack. The lawn tennis tournament opened the same morning, the badminton and the billiards in the afternoon. The polo match was declared off owing to the iron state of the ground. . . . This is the programme of the first thirty-six hours, and I have not included

the Collector's garden-party, at which, as our local reporter said, "a very pleasant afternoon was passed, helped by the clock golf and tennis." I think the pace grew hotter during the succeeding days. There were more jackal hunts, and a children's party, more dances, at one of which "youth and beauty chased the dying hours" (local correspondent again) until it was discovered the dawn had broken; amateur theatricals, a concert, and a Gymkhana. This last was, I gathered from old planters, the clearest sign of the decline and fall of race week. In the old days there would have been real races—with jockeys from Calcutta and betting that could be called betting—instead of such frivolous competitions as trotting for mixed pairs holding a handkerchief between them, cigarette and umbrella races, horseback tournaments, and so forth. Still, youth and beauty amused itself well enough as it was; and the only *contre-temps* that occurred (if one excepts the giving out of the station soda-water for the dreadful period of twenty-four hours) was due to an attack, or rather to a series of attacks, delivered upon merrymakers by the wild bees that lived in the treetops along the road going to

the club. Wild bees are often dangerous in India; most so perhaps in the jungle. But station bees are not very much safer if they live as these did on a frequented road and issue forth to do battle at a time when that road is particularly thronged. The Civil Surgeon was the first to sustain their attack, as he drove under their trees in his tumtum. Probably a kite had stirred them up just before he passed, but bees are undiscerning creatures when revenge is being sought. They selected the Civil Surgeon as a suitable sacrifice, and began with his pony, upon which a swarm of scouts settled. With heroic self-possession, the doctor and his syce descended and unharnessed the pony, which made off and was recovered some hours later from a pond in which it had immersed itself five miles up the road. Meanwhile the bees contented themselves with the pony's rescuers, who fled on foot in a black cloud to the surgery. The doctor emerged from it with one side of his face badly stung and swollen, to find other patients whom the bees had met farther along the road hurrying up to claim his assistance. One elderly planter who had driven into the swarm was instantly run away with

and had his cart smashed and his horse killed. What the Civil Surgeon resented was not so much his stings as these calls upon his time during race week. After the meet was over, he expected, he said, to be pretty busy, but not during it. I think he was pretty busy both during and after it. One can understand that. Bengal's coldest weather is not a season when incessant exertion and excitement can be maintained over a week without some one collapsing. I imagine the good old days must have provided even harder work for what doctors were to be had then. Think of the whole-heartedness with which they took their pleasure. Their soda did not give out for the simple reason that it had never come in. Those ancient stalwarts drank port and stout and hunted and shot in the full sun in the grey top hats of sporting England. Great sportsmen and pro-Consols they were, respected by the natives and even beloved, though they ruled high-handedly and were incapable of tolerating unrest. No conspiracies were hatched in their days except the Mutiny; no attempts were made with bombs and leading articles to shorten their careers. Yet, in proportion, their lives were very brief. The days

may have been very good, but there must have been much waste of priceless material, even so much as to justify the milder methods pursued by this less-glorious generation.

Well, the meet came to an end, and for us the parting came two days later. Already the ladies of the station had retired from the heat and glitter of the Club to the repose of their cool and shuttered rooms. The polished guests from Calcutta had taken train back to that Metropolis, protesting that they had had an excellent time in the Mofussil. The planters had driven off into the jungle whence they came, to inhabit once more the great desolate decaying bungalows that stand on the hills of sand which were thrown up so that they need not live on the plains, but could dwell well above the banked-in lake, lined with ornamental trees among which the porcupines have their holes, above the stone vats and the hot thatched village and the long fields of indigo. The assistant police officers had ridden away to raid dacoits on the frontier. The assistant engineers had trolleyed off to see that the lines were well laid that joined the jungles with the civilised world, the changeless people with the

ever-changing, the twelfth with the twentieth century.

We who had no business in India at all had farther to go than any of them—back to England, in fact, by way of Ceylon—and took a little longer than they to pack and take our leave. There were ceremonial party calls to be paid by Clothilde and ceremonial parting tips to be paid by me. The cook and the mali and one of the kitmatghars came to us with slips of paper on which glowing testimonials of their respective characters had been written (by a professional letter-writer in the bazaar), and asked us to sign our names below. We signed the cook's gladly, but the others were somewhat outside our sphere, besides being untrue, and the Collector's wife said that if we signed them we should only promote swell-headedness, and the men would give her the notice she intended shortly to give them. So we refrained and gave John a character instead. He wanted us in the first instance to sign a eulogy which he had himself somewhat laboriously drawn up. It was too Johnsonian for me to venture to put my name to, and I persuaded him to put up with a briefer, and I venture to think snappier,

description of his merits. Afterwards he brought Clothilde a long strip of the thin blue paper they use in the bazaars, and asked her to place her name at the bottom of that too. She thought at first that it was some further testimonial that he required, but on investigation it turned out to be a list of the various articles he had picked up in our service. I give it *in extenso*—

Presented to John Newman, Esquire—

5 Emply cheeroot boks.
3 Tin for cigarettes.
2 Medicine bottle.
3 Old sock.
1 Scubb Ammonia.
1 One pice pink silk.
1 Blue ribbing.
1 Pair tenis shoe (old).
2 Darn shirt.
1 Card boks.
1 Large pice flanil.

Grand Total 21 Pices.

"But what on earth do you want me to sign this for, John?" asked Clothilde, abashed by this documentary evidence of gifts that could not conceivably be considered either generous or valuable.

"You sign that," said our bearer gravely, "then I have paper to show Mem Sahib you give John those things."

"But she won't want to know."

"You sign," said John. "If I quarrel with other servants, p'raps they go to Mem Sahib when you gone and say, 'John Newman he steal one pice Madam's pink silk; he steal Sahib's one pair old tennis shoe.' Then I get in trouble, and police are sent to search house for pink silk and tennis shoe. Much trouble. But if Madam sign that she give all those things to John Newman, I show that, and all know John not steal things. You sign, please."

Clothilde signed.

There arrived the hour when on the platform of the station we had to say our positively last farewells. Everybody who was anybody to us was there to see us off, thereby observing the hospitable rites of the most hospitable country in the world. We were going back unaccompanied, and John's face was rather disconsolate, for he would have liked to attend us at least as far as Calcutta. Bonamalee's was puckered with some of its old anxiety. To him, I fancy, it seemed a pity that two people, whom he had

brought up-country with such care and had watched over successfully during many weeks passed in remote and curious places, should be allowed to take the enormous risk of travelling back alone to the sea. Yet out of sheer courtesy, as the whistle blew and the wheels of the train began to glide, he unravelled his brows. I think he did not wish us to feel at this affecting moment that we were necessarily doomed to destruction, even though we went alone and were igno-ránt as ever of the country. He unravelled his brows and salaamed profoundly. Out of the carriage window we waved our pocket handkerchiefs, signifying in return our best salaams to him and all Bengal.

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